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THE GIRLS SAT ON THE RUSTIC SEAT, AND MAINWARING PERCHED HIMSELF UPON THE ROUGH, WOODEN ARM.

O MISTRESS MINE!

—O—

CHAPTER I.

THE MAINWARING FAMILY.

The pleasant old streets of Grayminster were almost deserted beneath the fierce golden glory of a mid-June afternoon sunshine.

The broad pavement walks lay white and dry and littered over thickly with summer dust.

But, happily, there was never a breath of wind to whirl that dust about unpleasantly—not the ghost of a breeze to stir even the glinting weather-chanticleer, gracefulest and exalted upon the cupola on the roof of the Town Hall, standing there, with blinking windows, square and substantial, at the top of the Market-place, which in Grayminster was likewise known as the High-street; for it formed the widest, the cleanest, and the best portion of the town, after the manner of High-streets generally.

Within the very shadow of the white Town Hall, and on the shadier and pleasanter side of

the Market-place, there was situated a large red-brick house, massive and of imposing aspect.

In the front there were three rows of windows, set in heavy, old-fashioned frames; and the entrance door, before which was a spacious flight of steps, was likewise of heavy make and old-fashioned, with a ponderous brass knocker and a gleaming letter-box in the middle of it.

Adjoining the big house on the left, stood one considerably smaller, with "Office" painted plainly in letters of gilt upon the wire blinds of the lower windows.

And upon the office door itself there was fixed a polished brass plate, and on this brass plate the name of "Mainwaring" was engraved.

The larger house of the two was Mr. Mainwaring's private residence; whilst the smaller formed his offices or business-place. He was the first and foremost solicitor in the sleepy old town of Grayminster, being distinguished there, from other gentlemen of the same profession as himself, by the appellation of "Lawyer Mainwaring"—just as his father, and indeed grandfather, had been similarly distinguished before him.

The present Lawyer Mainwaring was a magis-

trate, and a most indefatigable man of business, and was well known for his abhorrence of idleness in any shape or form whatsoever.

He worked himself simply because he liked work for work's sake, and active life agreed with him. Not indeed because there was the least necessity for labour on his part, did Lawyer Mainwaring stick to his dry-as-dust offices.

Mr. Mainwaring was a widower, with a family of three children—one son and two daughters.

Ursula, the eldest of the three, was now four-and-twenty; Loudon, the son—in the family circle, and often beyond it, commonly called "Don"—just one-and-twenty; and fair Millicent the youngest, on the threshold of her twentieth birthday.

The interior of the Mainwarings' large house was comfortable and commodious in the extreme.

The entrance-hall was spacious, though rather low, and all the sitting-rooms opened into it.

Also opening into it there was a passage which led into the office-house—a passage, however rarely used except by Lawyer Mainwaring himself.

Ah the end of the hall the great carved stair-



case rose up, and hard by the stairs was a green-tinted swing-door, which gave access to a roomy lobby, and to a corridor which took one to the kitchen regions.

In this lobby—which in reality was more like a conservatory—one found a convenient French window, which opened out, down a flight of shallow steps, on to the Mainwarings' beautiful old garden, rich in a wide expanse of velvet lawn, that was sheltered and overhadowed by its elms and its cedar grove.

On this warm and windless June afternoon, between the hours of three and four, Ursula Mainwaring and her sister Millicent were seated in the shade of the cedars on the lawn, skimming a couple of gaily-bound volumes from the Grayminster circulating library.

On the soft turf, at his sisters' feet, London Mainwaring was lying half asleep—lying there on his back, with a cigar between his lips, his straw hat tilted over his eyes and his nose, and his hands clasped loosely at the back of his dark head.

Certainly a slender, well-grown young form here lay stretched in the grateful moonlight shade—strong, athletic, and muscular, with promise of Herculean proportions with the attainment of a fuller manhood.

His face was thin at present, olive-tinted, and strikingly handsome, lacking all suspicion of either beard or whisker—a silky, raven down, almost "blue-black," only just shadowed his red upper lip.

Somewhat he reminded one irresistibly of Miss Veley's glorious young "Percival"; only that, unlike that rather pattern and priggish young man, London Mainwaring loved his pipe and cigar.

For the past two years and a half he had been reading hard at Oxford; that is to say, up to the commencement of the Easter recess.

Since then, however, he had been resting at home in delightful idleness after his recent labours and tough examinations, and probably would not return to college again.

The choice of his future pathway in life was altogether in his own hands as it were; but between himself and his father there had always been a sort of tacit understanding that he—London—at the termination of a brief university career, should become a student and disciple in the venerable family offices, so that eventually he might succeed his parent in his high and respected calling, and thus maintain, by so doing, as chief solicitor in the town of Grayminster, the long established reputation of the Mainwarings.

And yet ever since Easter he had been doing nothing—absolutely nothing, except smoke and lounge—and now it was the early part of June.

His own father, on this afternoon, was busy enough in the next house—had betaken himself thither, to his half-dozen assistant-clerks, the moment luncheon was over in the dining-room.

London, on the contrary, with the girls and their novels, their pretty white frocks and Japanese sunshades, had quitted the table for the scented cool shade of their lovely old garden at the back of the house.

For the life of him, the young man told himself, he could not have settled down steadily during this beautiful summer weather in those dusty, fusty offices next door, all smelling so potentially of ledgers and parchment and Russia leather, and so insufferably close, albeit he was perfectly aware that "the governor" would have been better pleased with him, could he have betaken himself cheerfully to pens and law-paper at once, without further rebellion or idle delay.

For surely, if Mr. Mainwaring senior could stand the atmosphere of those respectable, dry-as-dust offices, his son, the vigorous young Oxonian, could stand it too!

It was not that London, secretly or personally, had the remotest objection to following in the well-beaten track of his forefathers—on the contrary, he was rather proud of the notion than otherwise; liked it, in fact; but somehow he could not make up his mind clearly and

thoroughly and to his own entire satisfaction just yet.

A vague unrest, of late, had taken firm possession of the soul of London Mainwaring, and try how he would, do what he would, he could not shake himself free of the emotion.

It made him transiently unstable as water, rendered him unsettled as shifting sands, though the will was in him to work, once he should resolve to do so; and, once having gripped the determination, he was not the man to take his hand from the plough and look backward regretfully to that which he had left behind.

No one but himself suspected the presence of this miserable mental unrest; not even his younger sister, generous, warm-hearted Millicent, whose perception and discernment, as a rule, were so keen and sure.

In fact, both sisters ascribed his vacillation, the tardiness of his awaited professional decision, to an invincible desire for a little more freedom and unrestraint before getting into harness and work in sober earnest.

"And, after all, it is no wonder," Millicent Mainwaring would say indulgently in his defence, when the question of London's prospects was reopened in the home-circle. "Generally speaking, men, poor fellows, are expected to work throughout the very best years of their lives; and I maintain that a good spell of laziness and loto-eating is only pardonable before they do really make a beginning and put their shoulder to the wheel."

Millicent had the knack of speaking out carelessly and plainly just whatever opinion or observation happened to come uppermost in her thoughts at the time.

The afternoon sunshine, gradually losing its fierce midday power, flung the shadows of the cool dark cedars longer and denser athwart the lawn.

London Mainwaring, tossing away the end of his cigar, jerked his straw-hat from those level dark brows of his, and looked up with a sort of mock languor and helplessness into the two fair sister faces above him.

"Girls dear," sighed he, "what is the time?"

Millicent, at the sound of her brother's voice, closed her book and yawned gently behind it. Ursula looked at her watch.

"It is just four o'clock," answered she, in her sweet quiet voice. "Oh, what an endless afternoon it seems! I wonder that no one should have thought of calling."

"Too hot for any cattle," London said, catching Millicent's yawn. "Couldn't reasonably expect a fellow, not reared in India, to turn out on such a day as this."

"Ursula never said 'a fellow,' you conceited boy!" Millicent corrected. "She was thinking of lady-visitors, of course. We are usually bleat with such a troop of them on an ordinary Wednesday afternoon. 'Petitionat afternoon,' as father calls it," added she, with her light gay laugh.

"Do you call this an ordinary Wednesday afternoon?" murmured London, pathetically. "By Jove! I should like to take off my flesh, as the clerical joker once said, and sit in my bones!"

Millicent laughed again; and Ursula explained mildly, whilst a faint colour rose and stained either fair cheek,—

"I thought, perhaps, that Miss Dinwiddie might look in for a chat. I know that she is anxious to consult me about the reelection of Mrs. Dodd, the matron of the infant ragged school. I have been expecting her to call on me daily."

"Buttons for little sinners' Breeches!" ejaculated London, in vulgar scoffing, but with long-lashed eyes closed; his handsome mouth—"a mouth made for kissing"—just parting in a barely perceptible smile. "Oh, hang Miss Dinwiddie! That dreadful old creature is everlastingly here, repeating to you girls, I'll be bound, all the scandal and gossip she can gather in the place. Seriously, though, Ursula, what does she really come for?"

Ursula Mainwaring's delicately-tinted face

flushed scarlet, and she bent her small sleek head low over the novel on her knee.

"You are neither kind nor respectful, Don," said she, with quiet severity—"but you are indeed very coarse. You know that I at least am fond of Miss Dinwiddie. She may be a trifle eccentric—I do not deny it—but with all her eccentricities, she is a perfectly harmless old gentlewoman. You may smile, and scoff, and be as vulgar as you please; all the same, it is the truth, Don."

"And we may presume, I suppose, that the Reverend Mark Sparrow is a perfectly harmless young pillar of the Church—Eh, Ursie, dear!" put in Millicent, wickedly. "Ah! the 'super-fine fineness' of his clerical white ties!"

Ursula looked greatly displeased, as in truth she was, glancing at her sister reproachfully as one who would say,—

"Et tu, Brute!—you too, Milly!"

London meanwhile, still sprawling full length on the lawn, whistled softly to himself.

"Her father, is not he?" he inquired, innocently, staring up again into the face of Millicent.

"Do you mean Mr. Sparrow?" questioned she with suspicious gravity. "Oh, no, Don! You are ridiculously mistaken. Of course he is Miss Dinwiddie's own nephew—not her father! Who could have put such nonsense into your head?"

"I fancy it must have been Ursula, now! come to think of it," replied Don, hypocritically. "Was it not so, Ursie, dear?"—regarding the damsel intently, now grown suddenly dignified.

"You know that I did not, Don," said Ursula Mainwaring, coldly.

Milly shook her head at London, in intimation that he had gone far enough; and so he obediently—but with a feigned glance of blank astonishment in return—checked all further words of badinage that rose to his lips, and said no more about the new rector of St. Eve's.

"Hark—listen, girls dear!" exclaimed London soon, raising his dark wavy head an inch or two from the turf. "Methought I heard the knocker and the bell?"

"Yes, I heard them too," cried Ursula, eagerly, now almost recovered from her passing displeasure. "Someone has called at last, I hope."

"Surely, Miss Dinwiddie!" Milly ventured.

"And the Reverend Mark, for a wager!" London sighed.

"Hush!" reproved Milly in a whisper. "We must not tease Ursula any more. It is too bad, Don—I should not like it myself."

In another minute the great French window in the lobby facing them had opened, and a shrill feminine voice came out to them upon the sultry afternoon silence. The parlour-maid held back the glass doors, and two ladies—one of them quite young, and the other much older—passed through and down the steps into the fragrant quiet of the garden.

"We will not trouble you to accompany us any farther," said the elder lady, and the owner of the penetrating voice, to the neat parlour-maid—a faultless study in black and white—"for I see your young ladies yonder on the lawn; and—ah! yes, Mr. London, I declare, with his sisters! We will go at once to them, thank you."

The maid retired; and the old lady began to wag her head vigorously in the direction of the group in the shade of the cedars.

Ursula and Millicent threw aside their books and rose forthwith from the rustic garden seat.

London Mainwaring likewise sprang up from the grass, a warm dusky flush overspreading his handsome young face. Into those dark, beautiful eyes of his there had shot a glad, feverish light, and he drew in his breath sharply.

"Dear Miss Dinwiddie!" exclaimed Ursula, rapturously, to no one, however, in particular.

"Somehow, I felt certain that she would come."

"Thank goodness she has brought Guinevere Wentworth with her!" said Milly in a quick aside to Don.

And just for those few simple words of hers, the young man rewarded his sister Millicent with an almost involuntary glance of intense gratitude and affection.

What, then, was this Guinevere Wentworth to him?

Just all the world, indeed—and nothing less!

CHAPTER II.
GUINEVERE WENTWORTH.

THE Mainwaring sisters and brother met their welcome visitors half way across the lawn—the girl whom Milly had called Guinevere Wentworth, and Miss Dinwiddie, the maiden aunt of the Rector of St. Eve's.

A singular old person indeed was Miss Dinwiddie, and known, at any rate, by sight, from one end of the town to the other. Yet she was by no means an "old inhabitant" of the place, but a resident of some twelve months only.

After the demise of the late Rector of the parish, the comfortable living had been offered by Sir Angus Adair to the Reverend Mark Sparrow, who had accepted the same gratefully forthwith. And soon the young clergyman, accompanied by his aunt—she having no wife or mother to look after him—arrived at Grayminster, and took up his abode there at the pretty old Rectory house.

A friendship between Ursula Mainwaring and Miss Dinwiddie had speedily sprung into existence; for Ursula was a great authority on parish matters generally, and on the training up in the way they should go of neglected little gutter-urchins in particular.

It has been said that Miss Janet Dinwiddie, in person, was somewhat singular-looking; and her manners were correspondingly queer. Her nose at the tip was unfortunately red, looking always frost-bitten, and her small thin face was painfully lined and shrivelled.

Her little twinkling eyes, however, were very shrewd and kindly, and Miss Dinwiddie's puckered-up little mouth was for ever on the smirk. Her iron-gray ringlets were parted altogether on one side; and she hesitated not to confess to any new acquaintance that to part them in the centre of her head was a natural impossibility.

She seldom sallied forth from the Rectory house without a huge blue-silk umbrella, which served her alike for wet days and fine. This afternoon, of course, she had brought her umbrella with her; and, standing there in the garden, she now put it up.

"My dears," Miss Dinwiddie exclaimed, shaking hands rapidly all round, with a sort of "charity-bob"—as Loudon Mainwaring described it—to each of them, as she did so—"my dears, are you not surprised to see us arrive together, myself and Miss Wentworth, I mean? But it so happened that we met upon the door-steps, and therefore one knock answered for us both! And in we came with each other!"

"I am sure we are charmed to see you, Miss Dinwiddie," Ursula murmured earnestly.

"Mr. Loudon, may I believe your sister?" questioned Miss Dinwiddie quickly, turning playfully to Don, who stood by quietly amused. "And yet I know that she is truthful."

"She is everything that is good, madam," he answered gravely.

"A young philanthropist indeed, as you know, where forlorn little street ragamuffins are concerned," put in Milly; "but I assure you, a very dear sister with all her faults."

"Why, I don't believe she has any!" said Miss Dinwiddie energetically.

Ursula Mainwaring laughed and blushed.

"The grass-paths in the kitchen-garden will be nice and cool now," she said, taking the old lady's arm affectionately; "let us walk round them, shall we, and talk over our business quietly, dear Miss Dinwiddie!—that is, if you are not too warm or too tired for the stroll!"

"I am neither one nor the other, my dear," replied the Rector's aunt briskly. "Your delightful old garden is always refreshing, always sweet and cool, let the day be ever so warm."

With a parting nod and smile to the others, Miss Dinwiddie moved away with Ursula, and soon was deep in converse about infant-schools and clothing-clubs, mothers' meetings and the reformation of drunken fathers.

Not until the elder Miss Mainwaring and her companion were well out of sight, hidden by a huge buttress of the kitchen-garden wall, did the other visitor—Guinevere Wentworth—open her lips to speak.

"Milly," she said abruptly, with something of the manner of a spoiled and petted child, "what in the world can Ursula see so irresistibly charming in that chattering, restless old horror? For myself, I detest her!"

"Oh, Ursula believes her to be perfectly harmless," laughed Milly Mainwaring, "and doubtless she is so. But surely, Guinevere, you did not walk to-day!"

"Yes, I was obliged to—I had no choice," came the petulant answer. "For the pony has gone to Packington. Mother would send him—so like her!—although she knew quite well that I wished to go into the town to-day. Let us return to where we found you—yonder there, in the shade of the cedars—and I will tell you what I am come for."

"To see us all, I hope," said Milly, lightly. "Yes, of course," smiled Guinevere, "and to ask you something also."

They sauntered back to the garden seats by the cedar grove, Guinevere walking between Loudon and Milly Mainwaring.

The young man's face was moody and clouded now, and his handsome mouth and chin had taken a firm, hard look.

Guinevere appeared as though she were either totally ignorant of or utterly indifferent to his proximity. No word as yet had passed between the two.

The girls sat down on one of the rustic seats; and Loudon Mainwaring, perching himself upon the rough wooden arm of it, kicked his long legs restlessly to and fro.

Guinevere, close to him, felt that those now sullen, dark eyes of his were fixed upon herself, though never a sign or moving muscle was there in the girl's clear, half-averted face to betray her consciousness of the fact.

And what a supremely beautiful face it was too—lovely in its wilfulness and discontent even, charming as it was faultless alike in mould and in colour!

For Loudon Mainwaring the whole wide world held no fairer woman than this—his sister Millicent's dearest friend, Guinevere Wentworth, who perhaps was more than a year his senior.

Guinevere had had a fatiguing walk from Ivylands, her home, to Lawyer Mainwaring's house in the centre of Grayminster—for Ivylands was situated nearly a mile from the confines of the sleepy old town.

Don saw that the beautiful face was looking tired and pale just then; and so, forgetting for the moment the attitude of indifference and hostility she had lately assumed towards himself, he spoke out in the fulness of his kind, boyish heart the thought that had flashed across his mind.

"I say Guinevere, you must be awfully fagged and thirsty. Let me run indoors and bring you out some lemonade, or claret, or—"

She raised slightly her golden-brown brows, and glanced up at him carelessly with half-veiled violet eyes.

"You are more than kind, Don—you always are, you know," she interrupted him, in her slow, sweet voice, "but I couldn't think of troubling you for the world. Now please don't move; I shall not touch anything if you bring it out here."

"As you will—please yourself, of course," he returned, almost rudely, resettling himself upon the arm of the brown wooden seat. "Perhaps you will let Milly get you a cup of tea!"

"Certainly Milly shall, if she will be so good—but by and-by," Guinevere Wentworth said, laying a determined and detaining hand upon Millicent's, and again ignoring Loudon completely. "Not at present, but at five o'clock when you and Ursula take your own, dear. Afterwards I must hasten away as quickly as I can, or mother at home will be in 'fits,' and desperately angry at my absence. We have a guest at dinner to-night, Milly."

Loudon Mainwaring's brows grew thunderous—black as winter midnight.

"Who is it, Guinevere?" asked Milly, curiously, "anyone we know?"

"He is mother's guest," explained Guinevere, indifferently. "Do not imagine that he is coming to Ivylands at any invitation from me."

"Well!" interrogated Milly shortly, flashing an anxious glance in her brother's direction.

"It is only our landlord," said Guinevere, now speaking softly yet distinctly—"our landlord, Sir Angus Adair, you know. He is often at our house—mother insists on asking him—as you may perhaps have heard lately. Grayminster will gossip, I know."

"Miss Dinwiddie has told us a little," Milly admitted quietly, "but Ursula and I scarcely believed that she was right. She so often gets hold of the wrong end of a story, that we thought—"

"What is this that you have heard then, Milly?" Don himself broke in impetuously, the warm blood leaving his olive cheek as he spoke. "Why have you not told me? Why should I be kept in the dark?"

Guinevere lifted her lovely eyes, in sudden, gentle caprice, to meet bravely those fierce ones above her.

"I will tell you," she stopped him. "She has in all probability heard—though it seems she has not told you, Don—that Sir Angus is going to marry me. How likely, is it not? I am scarcely the girl that would marry for title, wealth or position, even if the chance were mine—am I? It is not likely, is it, Don?" she repeated, the transient gentleness vanishing, and a light, defiant mocking tone taking its place.

"Likely! Heaven knows," he returned roughly; "I don't!"

"Nor care?" queried Guinevere; her lips actually smiling while her heart ached.

"No, nor care," he lied savagely, "why should I, pray?"

"Ah, why should you indeed!" she rejoined heartlessly.

Loudon Mainwaring thrust his hands down into his pockets, and stalked without another word towards and into the house.

Guinevere sighed as she watched him.

"How quick-tempered he is, Milly!" she said, softly.

"And how can you wonder at it?" Millicent demanded warmly, "you are unjust and cruel to him, Guinevere. You are not fair to him—you are playing with fire, a dangerous game! Oh! Guinevere darling, sinking her voice, and taking the hands of her friend caressingly between her own. "I always thought that you cared for Don; and not so very long ago, I am certain that you did. Since he has been home in Grayminster for good, you have altered curiously in your manner towards him, or so it seems to me. And yet I am convinced that he would give his life for you—you are all the world to him—and I know it!" concluded Milly staunchly.

"He is only a boy," observed Guinevere, dreamily. "How could I love him in—the way you mean, Milly? Besides, I am older than he, you know."

"Barely a year!" cried Millicent, contemptuously. "And pray, what is that?"

"A year on the wrong side," returned Guinevere, gravely; though she smiled again as she said it.

Millicent Mainwaring was waxing wroth—wroth in Don's cause rather than in her own. Idolising her brother as she did, she was ever ready to fight his battles, when he was absent and unable to fight them for himself.

"We never used to have secrets from each other," Milly cried, at once indignant and reproachful. "I say, again, Guinevere, you are neither fair to him nor to me!"

For a few moments Guinevere Wentworth became thoughtful and silent, and it would seem that Millicent's appeal had fallen on deaf ears; and then at length she smiled once more—this time a smile so full of tender melancholy and regret unmistakable, that, noting it, her friend's impulsive, short-lived anger changed quickly to forgiveness and the old trustful love.

"I do not believe that you are happy, Guinevere," said Milly affectionately, "and I did not mean to speak angrily, dear. Oh, how I wish that you would confide in me, darling, and let me know what it is that makes you so capricious and variable! Why do you snub Don so persistently and so unmercifully now, when in the old days you used to—"

"Milly," came the unexpected interruption, "do not waste your words on me; because I am not worth them, I am not indeed! I cannot confide in you," Guinevere said almost passionately, "for I have no confidences to impart. However, listen, Milly—this is no confidence, recollect, but just simply what all the world may know, for aught I care. I have discovered lately that I am selfish, heartless, mercenary, say, to the very core. I am of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy; and I do not think I would be different if I could. That, dear Milly, is, I believe, my true character; and if you dare to hint that it is in any way despicable, I will never speak to you again."

"I will not believe that you are speaking the truth, at any rate," answered Milly, with great solemnity.

"I am—indeed I am!" cried Guinevere, recklessly, sweeping back feverishly with her hand the feathery red-gold eyelashes from her low, wide, white brow. "And the sooner you let Don know exactly what I have said—so much the better for him and for me!"

"You may tell him yourself," said Milly, slowly "for I will not."

"Oh, he will find it all out soon enough," rejoined Guinevere, with a bitter little laugh. "And that, perhaps, will be the better way for him. Time will show."

Millicent Mainwaring looked at the speaker sharply, and was about to commence with another attack in Loudon's defence, when footsteps and a shrill voice warned her that Ursula and Miss Dinwiddie were near.

"Come," said Guinevere, rising hastily, anxious perhaps to avoid all further explanation and sparring with Loudon's indomitable champion—"let us join them. I have not yet told Ursula and you, Milly, what I came expressly for this afternoon. Should the weather continue fine, mother and I hope to have a tennis party next week. Of course you will come, although at present the day for it remains unfixed. But you shall know as early as possible."

"Oh, Guinevere, how delightful!" Milly exclaimed, now quite herself again.

"Don, and all of you, you know," said Guinevere, rather timidly. "Loudon must not refuse. We could not spare so splendid a player."

"My dear Miss Wentworth," here called out Miss Dinwiddie. "I am about to say good-bye. Are you coming with me?"

Millicent and Guinevere joined the other two.

"I cannot persuade Miss Dinwiddie to stay with us for tea; and it is nearly five now," said Ursula, distressed. "It should be brought out into the garden if she would."

"It is utterly out of the question," cried the old lady shrilly—"quite out of the question, my dear! I have talked myself hoarse, it is true; but you see my dear nephew will be waiting for his own by the time I reach home, and I always like to give him his cup with my own hands. No," in answer to pretty Ursula's persuasive cooing—"I really must not stay, much as I should love to in this dear old garden of yours. Miss Wentworth," she demanded again, "you arrived with me; do you leave with me in like manner?"

"She is more sociable," Millicent interposed, smiling. "She stays with us."

"Well, then, good-bye once more all round, my dears," the Rector's aunt said, nodding and smirking in her usual fashion, eyes, mouth, and little red nose all twitching comically together. "Good-bye!" and she waved a skinny mittened hand in adieu.

But Ursula Mainwaring accompanied Miss Dinwiddie and her baggy blue umbrella into the house; saw her depart; and returned to the garden.

Then Guinevere Wentworth told Ursula about the prospective tennis-party at Ivylands; and Ursula too—as Millicent herself had been—was enchanted with the news, although picnics and lawn-tennis parties were by no means rare occurrences in sleepy old Grayminster and its picturesque neighbourhood. But when one is young—oh, thrice happy, thrice blessed youth!—anything for pleasure, anything for a change!

"And do you intend to ask Miss Dinwiddie, Guinevere?" Ursula ventured to inquire.

"Oh, I dare say mother will call at the Rectory and invite both her and her nephew if you particularly wish it," was Guinevere's careless reply.

"That would be very kind," murmured Ursula thoughtfully, with gentle satisfaction and content.

The parlour-maid appeared at the large French window at the head of the steps, and rang a bell.

"Tea is ready!" cried Milly joyously. "So Ursula—Guinevere—come along with me!"

"But where is Don, I wonder?" said Ursula, looking around her, as if he might be hidden in the cedars somewhere.

"Indoors, I believe," answered Milly carelessly.

So the girls went in to their kettledrum, Milly's arm around the waist of Guinevere.

Something prompted Millicent Mainwaring to whisper suddenly:

"Oh Guinevere, promise me—promise me darling—that you will never marry Sir Angus Adair!"

Guinevere shivered; trembled from head to foot.

"Promise," whispered Milly earnestly.

Silence—only a shivering sigh from the pale lips of Guinevere.

"Remember Don," Milly breathed, "you were kind to him once."

Then Guinevere spoke—coldly and aloud, and withdrew her supple waist from Milly's encircling arm.

"I promise nothing," she said. "You go too far."

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

A DRESDEN CHINA clock on a bracket in the drawing-room at Ivylands rang out, silver bell like, the hour of six.

It was a very pretty room, with many books and flowers, delicate draperies and luxurious cushions, and faintly scented in every corner with the dry and crumpled rose-leaves of a summer long since past.

Indeed Mrs. Wentworth was often heard to declare, in the lisping affected fashion that rendered her ridiculous in the eyes of sensible people that she could not *live* in her drawing-room without her *pot-pourri* jars and bowls.

Before the two long windows, which opened on to the lawn, lay a tastefully-planned flower-garden, grouped here and there with flowering-evergreens, and divided from the public roadway by a tall, thick hedge of holly and yew.

The lawn-tennis courts were to be found on the southern side of the house, where the elms and larches and groves of cool, shining laurel shielded the dark springy turf from the heat of the summer sun.

Ivylands was by no means a large house. It was simply a pleasant, convenient-sized, white-walled habitation which had sprung up in the neighbourhood of Grayminster within the last half-century.

The old lord of the manor had built it for a whim upon a waste acre or so of his estate—that is to say, the father of the living Sir Angus Adair who was the reigning lord of the manor now.

Minster Court, the country seat of the Adairs, was situated almost immediately opposite to its more modest neighbour Ivylands; only the great house stood well back from the Packington-road surrounded by its finely-timbered park and grounds.

Packington, in reality, and not Grayminster, was the county-town; and the two lay some seven or eight miles apart.

Undenially a fine place was Minster Court, its gables and chimneys being visible above the park trees from the sloping lawn and garden-walks of Ivylands.

And Mrs. Wentworth herself was something more than proud to be on friendly, not to say intimate terms with Sir Angus, the present owner.

But then she was his tenant too; and the fact

had helped materially to strengthen the friendship between the two houses—the greater and the less.

It was only within the past few months that Sir Angus had returned from his wanderings in Eastern lands; he had been travelling indeed for several years preparatory to settling down at Minster Court as country squire and landlord amongst his friends and tenants.

Ivylands, however, had been originally leased to Mrs. Wentworth, then a charming widow with one little daughter only, both newly arrived from India, under an agreement with Sir Angus's father, at the time that Angus Adair himself was still a lad at Eton.

But a stroke of apoplexy had carried off the old Sir John, and the young Sir Angus had stepped into his father's shoes.

Lady Adair, the wife and mother, had followed her lord and master soon afterwards, dying one day with appalling suddenness from wholly unexpected disease of the heart.

After the death of both his parents, Sir Angus in time shut up his magnificent old Elizabethan mansion, which he found too large and mournful a place to live in alone, and went abroad to sojourn indefinitely just whithersoever his fancy might lead him.

He had neither brother nor sister to leave behind him or to take with him, and everyone said that to go away for a while was perhaps the best thing the young man could do; and pitied Sir Angus in his wealthy loneliness.

Sir Angus Adair had departed from Grayminster in the days of his youth, leaving his tenant's daughter at Ivylands a child of thirteen, to return himself a man of full six-and-thirty years, and to find the child he had left grown into a beautiful and capricious woman, with a face more lovely than any he had met with throughout his varied wanderings in other and distant lands.

And since his return to Minster Court, his visits to the Wentworths—beginning with an ordinary, ceremonious call, chiefly indeed of a business character—had gradually almost perceptibly, become very frequent; in fact markedly so; and worldly Mrs. Wentworth, noting well the fact, forthwith sketched out in her mind's eye a dazzling future wherein her daughter Guinevere should play no inconsiderable part.

Next to contracting a wealthy marriage for herself—and Mrs. Wentworth, at an early period of her widowhood, had fondly cherished the idea; an idea which, notwithstanding her good looks and fairly certain income, was doomed to eventual inaction—was surely the settlement of her only child in the most advantageous circumstances within her compass!

And Mrs. Wentworth told herself that it should be through no fault of her own, if Guinevere failed in winning the prize which her mother had marked out for her attainment.

Something of all this, then, had Miss Dinwiddie carried one day to the Mainwaring girls on the occasion of a certain morning call.

But they had simply laughed at the news—loyal Millicent indeed had openly pook-pooked it. All the same, it had made them rather uncomfortable; and neither Milly nor Ursula had thought it wise to mention the matter in the hearing of Loudon.

Don, sometimes, was so impulsive and uncertain.

As the clock in the drawing-room at Ivylands struck six, a lady who was seated by the lace draperies of one of the long windows, tapped her small foot impatiently upon the velvet pile of the carpet.

She was watching from her post by the window curtains the gates at the end of the gravel drive, which, turning with a smooth curve from the Packington-road, led up to the front entrance of the house.

Mrs. Wentworth resembled her daughter strongly; but the mother was fairer-skinned and plumper, while her mature beauty was spoiled in a general way by her absurd affectations of speech and manner.

She lacked too the glorious tawny colouring of brows and lashes which made the violet eyes of Guinevere Wentworth at once so rarely and so wondrously lovely.

Mrs. Wentworth's own eyebrows and eyelashes were in reality of an insipid flaxen tint—only she was in the habit of darkening them artistically—and her small white even gleaming teeth had been purchased many years ago.

As a girl, she had been the acknowledged belle of a rowdy garrison town; later on it was the same thing with her as a bride at a remote Indian station—and the long since forgotten fact was one which she herself could never really forget, and she imagined that she was irresistible still.

Certainly, to do her justice, she did not look her full age, which was nearing the borderland of fifty; and she wore no cap on her fashionably-arranged hair—nothing save an end or two of ribbon, and a scrap or so of valuable lace, which nestled youthfully in a fluffy mass of natural-looking tresses that formed the crown of her head.

On this evening, though yet quite early, she was already dressed for dinner; and across her powdered forehead a frown was gathering slowly.

"How wilful and trying she is!" Mrs. Wentworth muttered aloud; and she snatched out her watch and looked at it crossly.

She spoke in a perfectly natural and ordinary sort of voice; for alone, or with her daughter only, Mrs. Wentworth could be plain-spoken, sensible, and unaffected enough.

"She ought to be home by now," continued the mother, "worrying and fidgeting me like this! The man coming to dinner, and all too; and her dress yet to put on, and—"

Here the drive gates clanged-to, and the truant Guinevere appeared in the garden.

She strolled up the lawn between the flower-borders, awing her sunshade nonchalantly.

Mrs. Wentworth rose at once from her low easy chair, and framed herself in the open window.

"Come in this way," she began, peevishly. "Where in the world have you been all this while! At the Mainwarings'?"

"Yes; I stayed for a cup of tea," answered Guinevere, stepping listlessly into the room, and sinking into a lounge-chair opposite to her mother. "For I was awfully tired," she added—"the heat was intense."

"You should have waited until to-morrow," Mrs. Wentworth observed, fretfully, "and then you could have had the pony-carriage."

"I preferred going to-day without it," answered Guinevere, perversely. "After all, it doesn't matter."

Her mother made a gesture of impatience.

"Did anyone walk part of the way home with you?" she asked, suspiciously.

"No—who should?" demanded Guinevere; and yawned behind the handle of her sunshade.

"I—I thought that—that possibly London might have—"

Mrs. Wentworth broke off, and coughed rather nervously.

"No," said Guinevere, again; "why should he? It was broad daylight—it would have been nonsense to expect it. But, still if you must know, he never offered to do anything of the kind; and do you think that he ever will again, mother?"

"I am sure I can't say," returned Mrs. Wentworth hurriedly. "And what did they say about the tennis-party?"

"Oh, they will come!" replied Guinevere, indifferently.

And she rose from her chair with a weary air and moved towards the door.

"All?" inquired Mrs. Wentworth—"all three?"

"Certainly!" replied Guinevere, with a sudden angry flash of the violet eyes straight at her mother. "Ursula—Millicent—London—all three of them!"

Mrs. Wentworth bit her lip.

"Well, of course I shall be pleased to see them all," she said, hesitatingly; "but I do hope, Guinevere, that Don will—will make himself civil to Angus Adair. Your young Oxonians with a grievance—or a fancied grievance—are generally such insufferable creatures!"

"Are they?" returned Guinevere, contemptuously—contempt levelled at her mother. "Well, as it happens, I did not tell any of them that Angus Adair would be here. In any case, I presume that London Mainwaring is capable of behaving himself as a gentleman. Mother"—with the door-handle in her hand—"at what time do we dine?"

"At seven this evening," Mrs. Wentworth answered—"Sir Angus, however, will come early. I—I asked him to do so. So please make haste over your dressing, or he will be with us before you are down."

Guinevere shrugged her shoulders as she moved away, and the door closed.

Barely had she gone, when the garden gates clanged-to once more, and once more did Mrs. Wentworth look quickly and expectantly out of the window.

This time she got up suddenly, and glided swiftly to the nearest mirror.

After a few seconds of patting and stroking her fluffy false tresses, she returned to the window, her powdered and tinted face all wreathed in smiles.

Striding up the lawn, amongst the pretty flower-beds, there now came a big and rather heavy-looking man, bronzed and bearded, a light summer overcoat concealing partly his evening clothes.

For the second time that evening Mrs. Wentworth pushed back the window wide, and now stood framed again within its leafy entrance, and in a gracefully-studied attitude, her jewelled white hands extended in gushing welcome towards the man in the garden.

"Ah, Sir Angus," she called out softly to him, showing all her teeth, and, unintentionally, the gold which belonged to them as well, "how dear of you to take me at my word, and come early! Come in—prayer come in! I am alone—but Guinevere will be down directly."

And Sir Angus Adair stepped hurriedly forward, raised his hat, and bowed low, in rather foreign style, to his graceful, honied-tongued hostess.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE TOILS.

In the waning light of the warm June evening Guinevere Wentworth sat at the piano in the drawing-room at Ivylands, playing to Sir Angus Adair.

He stood there by the side of the instrument, staring down reverentially at those fair slim hands fitting lightly to and fro over the black and white keys.

And so standing by her in the scented dusk, dreamy and half spell-bound with the melody around him, he longed, with a longing that he could scarcely conquer, to gather those deft little hands fast into his own, to whisper to their owner how dearly he had learned to love her, and to lay all his wealth and his name at her feet.

Everything that he possessed in the world should be hers, would she only deign to accept it.

Somewhat after this fashion, indeed, were his musings shaping themselves; but Mrs. Wentworth was at the other end of the drawing-room.

It was after dinner, and Sir Angus had joined the ladies.

Guinevere, at his request, was playing some of Mozart's sweetest music, and Mrs. Wentworth herself, discreetly, in a cool and shadowy corner amidst palms and flowers, was reclining gracefully on a low couch, one eye partly closed, the other actually shut.

She was supposed to be asleep; but the partially-closed eye, in reality, was peering and blinking through the soft gloom in the room over towards the piano.

Sir Angus Adair loved music passionately, and presently he asked Guinevere to sing.

"Sing?" she echoed listlessly. "Really I do not think that I can, to-night."

"Do, Miss Wentworth—please!" pleaded he, bending earnestly over her—and Mrs. Went-

worth pricked up her ears—"you know that you have sung to me on other evenings?"

"But I am not in the humour now," she answered capriciously, almost pettishly. "I cannot always sing, Sir Angus. Besides, I walked into Grayminster and back this afternoon, and am feeling tired."

He sighed involuntarily, as though much disappointed, and her hands went on fitting idly over the black and white ivory keys.

Mrs. Wentworth bethought herself that it was time she woke up.

Accordingly she executed artfully a little restless movement on her couch, as though rousing naturally from a refreshing nap, and said drowsily and sweetly,—

"Was I dreaming, Guinevere, or did I really hear you say that you were going to sing to us? Ah, Sir Angus likes your singing, I know, and so does your mother, darling! What will you give us, Guinevere?—something soft and dreamy, and pathetic that you know without your notes, so that we needn't have the lamps just yet! Is that it, dear? The twilight is lovely for music—especially for singing."

At this honied suggestion, which Guinevere herself rightly interpreted as a command, Sir Angus's eagerness revived. He bent over Guinevere again.

"Yes, yes," he said gently. "Do not refuse us, Miss Wentworth, I beseech you."

And Miss Wentworth, intensely annoyed with her mother for placing her as it were, in a position out of which she could not well retire with becoming grace and ease, made answer quietly and maliciously,—

"Since mother and you both appear really anxious to hear me, I will try to be obliging, tired as I am. However, I must trouble you to ring, Sir Angus, so that we may have a little light upon the scene. I occasionally play, but never sing, in the dark—and won't now," she added calmly to herself.

"But Guinevere," Mrs. Wentworth began, in sweet reproachful accents—wrathful inwardly, outwardly unruffled—"I have frequently heard you say, darling—"

"I cannot sing without plenty of light," put in Guinevere, with a quiet insistent obstinacy peculiarly her own; "and Sir Angus will kindly ring for me. The song which I believe I can sing to you I do not remember without the music."

And yet, at the large old-fashioned red house in the Grayminster High-street, how often had not she and the Mainwaring girls sung songs to Don in the gloaming there—ay, songs and duets without number.

In those sweet old days that were now past and gone, Guinevere Wentworth had never cried out for lamps and candles when singing her tender love-songs in the twilight to London Mainwaring in the chair beside her!

Perhaps, had Guinevere been less certain of the goal that she, in her worldliness, was playing for half-hearted enough—the game that Mrs. Wentworth herself, however, kept from flagging always, by her tact, and airiness of touch, and undoubted skill—less confident of the crowning success which must arrive for her sooner or later—never, surely could she have been so utterly reckless, so completely oblivious, as to the possible interpretation Sir Angus Adair might put upon the indifference, which, since the full consciousness of her own power over him had dawned upon her, she rarely hesitated to display towards himself and his wishes, whenever it happened that they were thrown in the society of each other.

And that was a matter, indeed, of almost daily occurrence now.

As dear as life itself almost to Guinevere Wentworth were position and wealth, and the good things of the world which came in their train.

But yet there were hours when Mrs. Wentworth absolutely trembled for the future realisation of her fond hopes and dreams.

She always trembled more, though, when Guinevere had been with, or was in the company of, those friends of hers, the Mainwarings of Grayminster.

She did not know—perhaps had she known,

her mind would have been easier—that the girl was striving, with all the wavering strength of her soul, to steel her heart's best love and affections against London Mainwaring, whom Mrs. Wentworth now regarded as their worst enemy.

And for Guinevere Wentworth herself there were moments indeed when life seemed unspeakably empty and dreary, absolutely useless, vain, and undesirable—when she despised herself, scorned herself, loathed herself, and was forsooth, as she deserved to be, thoroughly and completely wretched.

But now—as she told herself—there was no turning back. She had travelled too far on the downward road.

So Sir Angus Adair obeyed his mistress's behest; and the bell was rung, and the lamps and the shaded waxen lights duly illuminated the pretty lylands drawing-room.

They revealed Mrs. Wentworth all company smiles and affected interest, and showed Guinevere's nonchalant, exquisite face as tranquil and indifferent as ever.

In the soft full light of the shaded lamps Sir Angus Adair looked, as in truth he was, every inch an English gentleman of birth and education.

His features were in no wise striking at first glance; but his figure, notwithstanding its rather heavy outline was a fine and powerful one.

It was a good, noble, and an earnest face, in every lineament; with patience and sweet temper mirrored in the candid gray eyes. Travel and an Eastern sun had bronzed him; and his hair, sparse in the broad high temples, showed signs already of premature baldness.

Guinevere, after turning over and toying about divers heaps of music, at last alighted on the piece she was seeking.

She never troubled to inquire what the eager listener at her side might care to hear. The patient, courteous gentlemen, she knew, would be satisfied with just whatever she chose to give him.

"I will sing this to you," she said; and, saying so, glanced up at him and smiled. The smile, a caprice of the moment, thrilled the man to the very soul—and Guinevere struck a sweet chord or two upon the keyboard.

"Something dainty and light, darling, I hope," cooed Mrs. Wentworth from her corner. "Is it one of dear Tosti's latest?"

For answer, Guinevere commenced, in a plaintive low voice, the well-known ballad, all so touching and tender in its true, simple pathos—"Auld Robin Gray."

And Mrs. Wentworth, listening with Sir Angus, writhed somehow on her couch as she heard it. Not that the old song in question was altogether applicable to the domestic situation and matrimonial case just then in her thoughts; but certainly, nevertheless, it was not exactly the most *à propos* selection that her wilful daughter Guinevere could have made to please so important a guest.

Presently the last chords ceased to sob and quiver, and Guinevere's white hands dropped into her lap.

"Thank you—thank you so much," Angus Adair murmured gratefully. "I love those old ballads. That one in particular is an especial favourite of mine. I well remember my mother singing it sometimes to my father."

"Thank you, my love," purred Mrs. Wentworth, on her own account, devoutly hoping to herself that Sir Angus was a man who meant what he said. "Dear Sir Angus would naturally appreciate your romantic old Scotch ditties, being a true-born Scotsman himself."

"And you really do care for it?" Guinevere inquired listlessly of her devoted friend.

There was a vacant chair near to the music-stool, and Adair sat down on it.

Mrs. Wentworth dozed again immediately.

"Yes," Sir Angus was saying, "but the story is sad, very sad—one of the simplest and saddest I ever knew."

His words appeared to stir something in the breast of Guinevere, for she faced him rather sharply in an instant.

"And are not all love stories sad, more or less?" she demanded, almost passionately. "Do

not love and unhappiness, as a rule, ever go hand-in-hand together? I fancy so."

Sir Angus Adair leaned forward in his chair, his curly dust-coloured beard nearly touching a knot of tea-roses on the bosom of Guinevere. His genial gray eyes were all aglow. She could feel his warm breath upon her throat and cheek.

"Not always, believe me, Miss Wentworth," he whispered. "I have known some love stories in real life and most happily and beautifully, the course of them having always run smooth. Love glorifies most lives it touches—it certainly wrecks few."

The fragrance of those roses in her bosom seemed to him intoxicating. The exquisite fairness of the proud, lovely face was dangerously near to the bronze of his own. He drew his breath more quickly.

Guinevere trembled. She spoke no word now. "Guinevere," he breathed softly—her Christian name leaving his lips unawares. "Guinevere—" more passionately.

What more he might then have confessed, Guinevere never knew. A sense as of suffocation was heavily upon her, and she put up her hands before her involuntarily, as if she would so ward off for yet a little while longer all that was burning in his heart to find utterance.

"Allow me to pass, Sir Angus, please," she uttered faintly; and rose hastily from the music-stool. "The room is too warm. I must breathe the fresh air. Nay—do not accompany me! I would rather go alone."

He stood apologetically aside, looking troubled, miserable lest he had offended her—contrition in every line of his kindly face.

She passed him swiftly, looking down, and quitted the drawing-room for her own.

When she returned to it, Mrs. Wentworth was making tea at her pretty, fanciful tea-table—daintily and affectingly as her habit was before a guest, stranger or other.

"Naughty child!" exclaimed the mother, gaily. "Naughty truant! Where have you been hiding? Sir Angus and I have been simply dying for a little more music. Oh, so! Guinevere, to desert us for so long!"

But there was no answering false gaiety in the countenance of Guinevere Wentworth, no responsive false smile. Her features were serene and composed once more, her beauty and grace tranquil and cold as ever.

And Sir Angus Adair himself was happy again; for was not once more in the presence of the woman he loved?

He was gone at last. He had grasped her hand at parting almost to pain unendurable.

But, thank Heaven! he had left unsaid those words she dreaded to hear—a dread, indeed, as inconsistent as it was deeply-rooted and intense.

For did she not know well enough in her heart the answer she would accord to him when the evil hour could be staved off no longer?

Yes—Guinevere knew; and right well did she abhor herself for so knowing!

He was gone, and she was alone—alone and locked within her own chamber, with no mortal eye to witness her self-abandonment and her pain.

She was kneeling there by the bedside and weeping unrestrainedly—weeping bitter, wilful, passionate tears, the copious flow of which she could not check, nor hardly wished to either. Tears indeed came as a relief.

"Oh, Don, Don, my darling, my love!" sobbed Guinevere, "what must you not think of me—what must you not say of me! But I deserve it all and more, Don, so think and say your worst. Nothing is too bad for me, my darling—it would be better if I were dead!"

And then she thought that perhaps a day might come when, in his jealous pain and fury, he would really kill her for her treachery—such things had been known to happen in the world before now.

And the passing thought made Guinevere almost glad.

"For I should be happy and at peace then," she said. "And, living, I never can know peace again!"

(To be continued.)

CINDERELLA.

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CHAPTER V.—(continued.)

FANNY did not come to for a long time, in spite of a generous supply of cold water, and violent rubbing of her extremities.

"She has seen the little grey man," was whispered round the circle, in an awestruck whisper, as the girls shrank close to one another for mutual protection, and locked and barricaded the door.

Their surmises were perfectly correct. When she came back to consciousness she shuddered and wept and was quite hysterical, as, in a broken voice, she declared that there, just at the corner in the wall near the next room, she had been going by, thinking of nothing, and, all of a sudden there was a figure close to her—a hideous dwarf, with an enormous head, wrinkled yellow skin, and fierce black eyes, dressed in a short grey cloak, and a tall peaked grey felt hat.

"Such a wicked look as he gave me," she reiterated, "it makes my flesh creep to think of him. Oh, I shall never get over it."

They were a long time in getting her to bed, and she insisted on having someone to sleep on either side of her for protection, and talking was carried on till the small hours, and Cindy heard more about the house and its character than she had ever done before.

Almost everyone had seen something or heard something strange and unaccounted for, and many had left the school, and others would gladly have followed their example, but their parents would not listen to them. Miss Jones's terms were so cheap, and the Miss Jones's themselves shut their ears, and were deaf as the traditional adder to any tales, and a girl who came with a story or made a scene got no redress; indeed, she was frequently punished.

Some openly believed in ghosts. What else were the voices, the footsteps the whistles, the visions of the Dwarf, also of figures seen in the garden and the empty offices. Others maintained that a gang of coiners carried on their trade in some part of the house which was shut up, and which was exceedingly mysterious.

There was a legend that a large suite of rooms, fully furnished, was in the closed wing, and that there were cellars below the house big enough to hold a regiment.

It seemed that everyone had had an experience except Cinderella, and she was not to be singular in this respect for long.

If there was one punishment more dreaded than another, it was being sent to bed before tea. Girls would do anything rather than lie alone wide-awake in the great empty top of the house. It was chiefly there, in the twilight hour, that people and things had been seen.

Cindy, for some minor fault, was despatched to bed at four o'clock, and went singing upstairs. She liked a holiday. She meant to read a story-book, and was more triumphant than penitent. She went to bed—it seemed so strange by daylight—and being quite well—and the whole of the top story was so quiet and silent. She took her book, prepared to enjoy herself, it was *The Children of the New Forest*, and she was soon absorbed in her history.

She read steadily on, holding it closer to her eyes as the light failed. A sudden sound of stealthy footsteps coming along the passage caused her heart to beat a little faster.

"Could it be the little grey man?" she asked herself apprehensively. It was.

The door gave a little creak, and a hideous head was protruded inside, just a little higher than the door handle.

Their eyes met pointblank, for her he! exactly faced the door, and they looked at each other for fully a minute.

He was very swarthy, with beetling brows and a large wart on his nose. He was indescribably hideous and repulsive looking. But he was no ghost; he was flesh and blood.

She was convinced she saw his eyes and lips move, and the dirty hand that grasped the door around which he peered was very human.

He was not as tall or as big as she was, she said to herself, boldly; he was nothing but a dirty little dwarf. She was not afraid of him. She would see who he was, and what he wanted. "Who are you?" she cried, throwing down her book on the counterpane, and speaking in a loud voice, and in a tone that sounded strange even to herself.

A hideous grimace was his only reply, a rolling of his eyes, a lolling out of his tongue. It was a face she could have made herself. She was notorious for frightful contortions of her countenance; and, all timidity cast to the winds, she now sprang out of bed and rushed to the door.

Her sudden action took the dwarf very much by surprise; he darted back and scuttled down the passage.

She noticed the very look of his funny little short legs as they trotted nimbly along under his heavy body.

He rushed into a room where they kept their boxes, and into another off that containing old lumber. By the time she had followed him he was gone, had vanished.

Valiant Cinderella looked about in bewilderment, there was not a sign of him to be seen.

She had the hardihood to search among the dusty old furniture and in vain; and then, quite carried out of herself by her adventure, she sped downstairs like a lapwing, in night-dress and bare feet just as she was, and burst into the schoolroom, breathless.

It was what was called the "silent hour"—the time for learning lessons for the following day.

The elder girls acted as warders, so to speak, and kept order. You can picture their astonishment when they saw Cinderella panting before them, exclaiming, imperiously,—

"Listen, girls, all of you. I've just seen the Dwarf."

This announcement insured her an attentive hearing; every head was raised at once, every eye fixed on her intently. You might hear a pin drop.

"He came to the door and looked in for a good while. I asked him who he was, and he only made a face—like *this*—so I just jumped out of bed and ran after him."

"Here a murmur of amazement and incredulity ran round the room.

"It's made up; she never saw him," cried Fanny from a distant desk. "An excuse to come downstairs."

"What was he like?" demanded another, austere. "Describe him."

"He was only a little taller—half a head—than the handle of the door; he had a big head and body, and short legs in leather gaiters; he wore a grey cape; he has a hideous yellow face, big eyebrows, and a wart on his nose!"

Undoubtedly it was this last enumeration—the wart—that carried the day and conviction to her listeners' ears, and she was at once regarded as a heroine.

"Fancy following him into the far box room," ejaculated one in an awe-struck tone, "and his vanishing into thin air!"

"Of course," urged another, "you'll never go back up there to bed all alone. Wrap yourself up in a cloak, and stay. I would sooner die than go back!"

"Of course I shall go back," she returned, bravely, proud of the sensation she had created, and determined to show her courage. "I'm off now. I'm not afraid of the little grey man," waving her arm to her schoolfellows with a gesture of patronage. "So good-bye," and in an instant she had departed as speedily as she came.

Her boasting brought her no ill-luck; instead of that she became a person, young as she was, of some importance in the school.

She was looked upon with a strange mixture of awe and respect, despite her tender years.

She was the only person among sixty girls who had dared to chase the hugar of the school, and who was not afraid of him; indeed it was rumoured that he was afraid of her, for she never once saw him again, and his visits to the upper story ceased for a long time.

CHAPTER VI.

TIME went on. Cinderella was growing up. She was very tall for her age—past sixteen. She was now in long dresses and the first class. She had spent several holidays with her friend Letty, whose father was a clerryman in a neighbouring county; but her last holidays (summer ones) she was compelled to pass at school, for Letty's relatives had scarlatina.

She saw, as she had often seen before, the other girls' boxes brought out, and packed and corded, and they and their owners depart to enjoy themselves at home in the height of summer for six weeks; then the Miss Jones's went to the seaside, the cook went, and the housemaid and Cinderella had the whole place to themselves.

She was never a girl who could sit down quietly and work or read all day, and day after day, and keep herself cool and quiet.

No, the blood that ran in her veins was like quicksilver. She was young, adventurous, and restless, and must be doing something; but it was not easy to find occupation.

She breakfasted, practised, drew, read a few pages, then threw away the book, and set out to wander about the place in search of she knew not exactly what. If she had put it plainly into words, perhaps, it would have been "the house's secret," to discover and wrest it from it—for that it had a secret no one doubted, not even the Miss Jones's themselves.

Day by day she rambled about the gardens, the house, the out-offices, and saw no one worse than herself, but she heard plain footsteps more than once and more than one, in the dusk.

She picked up a man's glove in the garden, quite a respectable dogskin one, rather small size, and she discovered a well-beaten track in the wilderness, the approach to which was carefully concealed by weeds and bushes—a track that looked as if it was in constant, if not daily use. Who used it? None of the legitimate tenants of the house, that was certain.

She found the clue quite by accident. She was routing out some books from a rusty old cupboard in a big empty room they used for dancing, and which corresponded to the school-room in size, and was exactly above it. In pushing and struggling with a book tightly wedged in between two others, you can picture her astonishment when she felt the whole bulk of the book-case coming towards her *en masse*.

She thought the house was about to fall down or the end of the world arriving, instead of which it was a door—a door on which were these shelves, and she had unwittingly opened it. She peeped through, and found that she was in the shut-up wing—at least so she concluded, in a kind of vestibule. She walked forward on tiptoe, over inches thick of grey, soft dust—the dust of years—and opened the first door. She was now in a fine, well-furnished ante-room—no dust, no cobwebs here. It was in use, though at present empty. A buzz of talking came from the next apartment, and her curiosity and courage bade her step that way.

The door was ajar, the windows closed and curtained with thick red curtains; candles burnt upon a long table in the middle of the room—a table round which twenty or more men were sitting, for the most part young. Some were dressed in the most studied fashion of the day, others were in working dress; one was a policeman, another a railway porter, but they all seemed equal now, and intent on some important matter. Writing materials, maps, books, photographs, and pistols lay on the table. Cinderella took in all with one lightning glance.

The president, so to speak, sat at the head of the table, a foreboding-looking dark man, with a high, narrow forehead and grizzled hair. He was reading out a list of names—strange, unfamiliar names. His audience paused now and then to interrupt with a remark in a strange, unknown tongue. In the background, in a low seat, his chin in his hands, his eyes on the ground, sat the Dwarf. Could she be awake? Was she not dreaming? Were these men in this luxurious room holding a council—under Miss Jones's prim roof. Who were they? They

were neither gamblers nor coiners. "What would the girls say to *this*!" was her thought.

Prudence whispered that she had better steal away; the door was only two inches ajar. She had not been seen.

Alas! How often is one's fate altered by a sneeze. The dust of the passage had got into her nostrils, and before she had time to realise what was going to happen, she had sneezed twice violently. The door had slipped out of her hand, and she stood confessed "a maid in all her charms."

There was an immediate rising, the president himself the first to set the example. As his eyes fell upon Cinderella he became the colour of ashes.

He had to hold the table with his hands to steady himself, as in a strange, hoarse voice he demanded in English,—

"What brings you here, Pauline?"

"I live here," she replied, timidly, for she was surrounded on all sides by fierce, angry faces.

"You live here—how!" he asked, now wiping his brow.

"At school. I have lived here for nine years."

"You at school!" with a harsh, sarcastic laugh; "you at school, Pauline Dormanoff."

"I am not Pauline Dormanoff, I am Pauline Rivers," she returned, tremulously.

"But you are her living image. Come!" seizing her roughly by the wrist, "no more of this fooling; I know you too well."

And here he broke out into a strange language, and hissed many hard words to her between his teeth, shaking her violently by the wrist all the time.

Meanwhile she was the centre of an excited and voluble crowd, and the door was locked behind her.

Here was a situation in which to find herself! So much for curiosity! She was evidently the subject of a prolonged and stormy discussion, too, as, after a moment, the leader released her, returned to his seat, and gave an order in an imperative tone, and there was silence.

First one man spoke, then another, pointing at the girl to emphasise whatever they were saying.

The latter, after having made a fiery speech, shook his head in a manner that spoke volumes, waved his hands in the air, and sat down, Cinderella all the while leaning against the wall, not daring to move, whilst her fate was being weighed in the balance.

She gazed from one to the other, and saw no traces of pity; yet they were young men. Their countenances were flint, their eyes fierce and stern and strong.

After a discussion that lasted what seemed to her an interminable time the president raised his voice, and said,—

"Pauline Dormanoff, advance to the table. You are probably not aware that unwittingly you have stumbled into the council chamber of a secret society. We are an assembly of desperate men. To have our existence, our haunts, our appearance discovered means death to one and all of us, and who but a madman would trust a woman with a secret? It were better you should perish than twenty," taking up a revolver, and looking keenly at her as he spoke.

"Do you mean to murder me?" she gasped out, with white, parched lips, steadying herself by the back of a chair.

"It will not be murder; there is no such thing in our law. It is merely a judicious removal to benefit the many. It will be instantaneous, I promise you. If you know a prayer, say it."

"There is an alternative," said another man, who sat facing her, with his chin resting on his hands. "Don't kill her. Besides, what should we do with the body? I hate unnecessary bloodshed. Let her take the oath, and become one of us."

Here arose a great clamour, a trebly excited discussion.

With her eyes, and ears, and wits preter-

naturally sharpened she glanced from man to man.

She could see that there were two parties, one headed by the president, who had called her Pauline Dormanoff, and that party wished for her life, and the chief speaker and the most impassioned against her was this man.

He clenched his fist, he gesticulated, he stamped, he shouted. His words appeared to carry weight.

Her trembling knees refused to carry her any longer, and she collapsed on the floor in a dead faint.

When she came to herself she was seated in a chair; a paper and pen were before her.

The room still was whizzing round, and the president's voice, as though miles away in a mist, seemed saying,—

"To save you *you* become one of us. Your name will be entered in the list, and circulated among the members for their instruction, and you take the oath. Repeat it after me,—

"I, Pauline Rivers, do hereby swear, in the presence of a full council, to become an humble and obedient member of the body called 'The Hand of Justice,' to preserve its secrets as I would my life, to carry out its instructions to the letter, and to be ready, no matter when or where, to lay down my life for the cause."

She murmured the above after him as if in a dream.

She signed her name in a huge ledger with trembling, uncertain fingers, and she, Pauline Rivers, school-girl, was a sworn member of a body that held the whole of Europe in terror, and that dealt out death and punishment with swift and secret sure strokes.

"Remember that if you fall away from your oath the punishment is death," said the President. "No matter where you are our arms can reach you. We are everywhere."

"Little do our stolid county neighbours guess that one of our principal branches is in their midst, and has been held in this house for years; that orders go from this table, from this spot, to the Caspian, from Archangel to Egypt, nay, further."

"The Dwarf there," pointing to the little grey man, "is a dummy. He has been our watchman for years, and you, Pauline, shall share his duties, and keep your inquisitive friends far away from us. Should another follow your example, she shall not be spared."

"We have no time for sentiment, too much has been lost already. One word. How did you get in? I thought there was no entrance on that side?" nodding his head towards the vestibule.

"I came by a door behind a bookcase in the empty room," she faltered, in a low voice.

"A door! Indeed! That must be seen to at once. This is far too secure a retreat to run risks with. We shall not want you again at present. You may go. No doubt we shall find you employment ere long. A young and pretty girl is always a useful weapon when she is prudent. You will be prudent, for you know the cost of imprudence," looking significantly at the pistol beside him; "and now we need not detain you any longer," making signs to the Dwarf to take her back.

As she passed behind the table, in his wake, all the men who so lately had been clamouring for her life rose as one, and accorded her each a deep obeisance as she left the apartment.

Walking as if she was in her sleep, they (she and the Dwarf) turned into a passage lighted by a lamp, then they went down a flight of stone steps, then into an underground tunnel, very narrow and very damp; it went beneath the garden and came out in the middle of the wilderness.

A door opened on some concealed steps, and Cinderella found herself on the well-beaten track she had already discovered and was unable to account for. She could account for it now, she thought with an involuntary shudder.

Here, once more in broad daylight, the Dwarf and she confronted each other for a moment. He paused and looked at her exhaustively; then with a dreadful pantomimic gesture jerked his

thumb backwards to indicate the secret society within, and shut his eyes, then nodded emphatically at his companion, and drew his finger across his throat from ear to ear, with hideous suggestiveness.

Was this to be her fate? She would not wonder—she wondered at nothing, her brain seemed stupefied. Seeing the impression he had made in her blanched face and trembling lips, he laughed a horrid, discordant laugh, like the howl of some wild beast of prey, waddled hastily down the steps, and banged the heavy door after him inside its curtain of creepers, leaving her alone.

No wonder Mary Jane, the housemaid, remarked upon her loss of appetite, and thought somehow that Cinderella did not look herself at all. If she knew the ordeal she had been through so recently she would have wondered less.

Next day Cinderella was in a high fever, and for more than a week she could not leave her bed. Mary Jane was very kind, brought her books and fruit, and sat with her at her sewing. The invalid insisted, too, that she should sleep in her room. She had no wish to see her condutor, the Dwarf. Strange to say, at last she was like all the other girls—nervous.

At the shutting of a door she trembled all over like a leaf, a sudden sound she started violently. She slept badly, she talked in her sleep—"very queer talk, indeed," according to Mary Jane; but in about ten days her mind and body recovered their usual state of health and youth. A good strong constitution, large, airy rooms, and lovely summer weather, and simple diet wrought the cure.

CHAPTER VII.

ADVENTURES, like other things, never come alone; they go in threes, in my opinion, like misfortunes, good luck, and the graces.

Pauline was better, much better, though Mary Jane still slept in her room, and one afternoon they had been out together shopping in the High-street—quite a dissipation for them.

Mary Jane was investing in a new dress, and had begged the benefit of Miss Rivers's taste and advice.

The dress was chosen, and was all that Mary Jane's fondest wishes had painted. She now had gone to the butcher's, whilst Pauline went to the post-office to post a letter (a third, humble, agonized appeal to her sisters to remove her from school.)

She felt that to remain on at Miss Jones's, now she knew the secret of the house, the secret which was like a volcano in their midst, that seemed so unnatural, theatrical, improbable, and that yet was a ghastly reality, would drive her mad.

She would be anything, she had urged in this last appeal; their humblest servant—only take her away from Miss Jones's school.

As she turned round from dropping her missive into the box she noticed a large open laundau drawn up, and an old lady leaning back in a fatigued attitude, wrapped up in magnificent furs, although it was an August day; a shrivelled little old lady, with a high, thin nose, and sharp, dark eyes.

She looked like a little old fairy, Pauline said to herself, with a smile, as her eyes encountered the piercing orbs of this aristocratic venerable person.

She seemed to have received a kind of shock. She started upright at a dart, whilst, unknowing of the sensation she had created, Pauline walked calmly away; but in a moment, a powdered footman was running after her. Breathless, he panted out,—

"Beg pardon, miss, but the Princess wishes to speak to you at once."

The Princess! Pauline had never ever seen one in her life. Was the man stark, staring mad?

However, she followed him back to the carriage, and discovered that the old lady like a fairy was the Princess, who wished to see her.

She seemed strangely agitated. Her features were working, her eyes blinking, her breath coming in little short gasps as she eagerly bent forward, and said,—

"Excuse me, but what is your name?"

"Pauline."

Before she had time to add "Rivers" the fairy had thrown herself back with a sigh of relief, and said,—

"Ah, I'm never mistaken. I knew it. Get into the carriage, my dear; I wish to have a talk with you."

Then to her coachman,—

"Take a turn of two miles along the broad road, and come back here. Now, my dear," taking Pauline's hand in hers, "tell me all about yourself—quickly, quickly, quickly!"

She spoke in a curious foreign accent, but with great fluency, and had, like all foreigners, a considerable amount of "manner" and what is called manner and gesticulation.

"You are very kind," said her bewildered companion; "but there is so little to tell. I am an orphan."

"Ah, alas, I feared so! Poor Pauline!"

"I never knew my father or mother. He was killed by an accident before I was born; and she died when I was a few weeks' old."

"Yes; and what then?" impetuously.

"Then I was brought up at a farm till I was six; then I came home to Mount Rivers, and then I was sent to school here. I have been at school, and never going home for nine years," her voice breaking as she spoke, and tears, in spite of herself, springing to her eyes.

"Then, have you no relatives at all, *ma chère*?"

"Two stepsisters, who were older than my mother. They own the family place. They hate me. They are worse than nothing. They never write to me, or notice me from year's end to year's end."

"As had as Cinderella's sisters," with a little dry laugh.

"Yes," with a wintry smile, "I was always called Cinderella by the servants, because I was brought up in the kitchen."

"And what is your name beside Pauline, my child? and where do your sisters live?" shaking her curls.

"Rivers is my name. They live at Mount Rivers, near Foxrock, in Cornshire, very far away from here."

"Ah, yes, I know them; tall, sharp nosed, elderly, one of them married. The husband was a *roué*. He is now dead; but he spent all her money first—gambling, racing, betting, *affreusement*. And now it is your turn to hear a little about me," looking at her young companion out of her dark, heavy-lidded old eyes. "Your mother was my niece—my dear niece, till she fell into disgrace with me, and ran away, and I lost her," in an altered voice.

"To think that after all these years I should pick up her very image and her only child in the street of a wretched little English town! It's amazing. It was Kismet."

"I am your grand-aunt, Cinderella, and I wish I could take you away with me now; but I cannot. I am returning to Russia to-morrow. I must go; but I shall come back again. I shall certainly come back."

"Cheer up, dear child; bright days are in store for you yet. I am going to be very good to you. I shall be your fairy godmother for the sake of poor Pauline. Kiss me, child. You have your mother's eyes. You don't know my name."

"My name is Princess Sophie Dormanoff. I am rich; I have no children. Politics are my children since your mother left me."

"Many people think me an old witch. I know too much; but I am not nearly so old as I look, and my brain is as young as ever. Here," taking off her glove, "is a ring," displaying a magnificent diamond one on her thin, shrivelled forefinger. "Have you any token you can give me, Pauline. I suppose you have your mother's diamonds, *cela va sans dire*!"

"No, I never knew she had any."

"What!" colouring even through her pallor. "This must be seen to; you shall not be robbed. Give me that little silver brooch as a token, and when I send it to you it is a sign you are to come to me or that I am coming to you. Now,

here we are, Pauline, and we must part for the present. I wish I was not leaving England to-morrow, for your sake. You have given me a new interest in life."

"Tell me one thing," said Pauline, impatiently. "Was my mother a Russian as well as you?"

"Her father was a Russian, her mother English. She was both, you see. Now get out quickly. Do not say anything about our meeting; but if I am alive you will see me again before the snow is on the ground; you may be sure of that."

And with these parting words the little lady pulled up her fur rug, waved her tiny hands to her grandniece, and was whirled rapidly out of sight, leaving Pauline standing in front of the post-office as motionless as if she had been turned into a pillar-box.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHETHER it was that her sisters were touched by her appeal, or whether they felt that they could not always keep Pauline at school, or whether Miss Jones had written to announce that her pupil was "finished," I cannot say for certain; but Pauline received a favourable answer to her letter, enclosing money for her journey (second class), and within a week was once more at Mount Rivers, where she did not receive a very warm or sisterly reception from Matilda and Caroline.

And so she was once more back at Mount Rivers after an absence of nine years. She was past seventeen, and quite grown up, and looked, her sisters said, older than her age.

She found everything very much changed, both with regard to the place and the people. Mrs. Taff was gone. Phoebe had taken her post, and was housekeeper and confidential maid rolled into one.

There were very few servants. Many of the rooms were locked up and the shutters closed. Grass grew high in the once trim pleasure ground, the trees were in sad need of pruning, no carriage was sent to meet her, only a hired and musty fly.

The great, big stable-yard was empty, grass and moss sprouted between the stones; the vegetable garden alone was in some order, because the vegetables and fruit were sold to a man who had a contract for the garden.

Poverty and pinching were stamped on everything, and more especially on her two sisters than on aught else.

Nine years had made a great difference in their appearance. They were nearly forty, but looked far more.

Many women of their age have still a fresh, juvenile, bright Indian summer of looks; but they never were young. They were scoured and embittered from their very "teens," and Fortune had turned her back on them almost ever since the day that Pauline was sent into banishment.

Matilda had married, shortly after Lord Rockford's defection, a young foreign count, whose charming, insinuating manners would wile the very birds off the bushes, whose handsome face had played havoc with many a girl's heart, but none had such solid attractions for him as Matilda Rivers—Matilda, the mistress of all those broad acres, of money in the funds, of pictures, carriages, horses, plate!

True, Matilda was thirty, and by no means beautiful; but he could not have everything. He feigned an overwhelming passion for her person (when it was her purse with which he was enamoured).

Deluded Matilda did not discover this. She was enraptured with her fascinating lover, and in spite of the advice of older people, who recommended her to look well before she leaped, and who were somewhat suspicious of this guitar playing, sweet-voiced Count Villani, she married him and became a Countess. Poor woman! It was the only consolation she had—this handle to her name.

He lived abroad (and so, of course, did she and Carrie), and at first it was a kind of royal progress, but after a time the huge cheques which he demanded of his "loveliest" Mattie made her

wince. His property, he said, was in a little difficulty at the time, but would be available shortly, and he would take her to his place in the Apennines, where she would reign as "queen of beauty and of love." Meanwhile, they must live, but living did not surely include gambling at the tables, betting, card-playing. He spent, and spent, and spent. He began to be harsh and tyrannical and neglectful. He no longer begged for money. He demanded it as a right, and she, poor fool, still madly in love with him, bought his smiles and his good graces by thousand of pounds. In spite of Mount Rivers being a fine estate, with well-to-do tenantry and a large yearly rental, it could not stand the continual strain—everything going out, nothing coming in. Farm after farm was mortgaged, trees were cut down wholesale; finally, in desperation, pictures and plate were disposed of secretly; all the horses and carriages were sold, and most of the servants dismissed. When Count Villani had, as it were, sucked the orange quite dry and spent every available shilling, he forged Carrie's name for a large sum, and disappeared quite suddenly. Carrie had to "pay up." She could not possibly expose her sister's husband, and they returned to England sadder and wiser women, to live on the remains of their shattered fortune in a few rooms at Mount Rivers. After a time they heard of the death of the reprobate, and Carrie for one breathed more freely. By dint of most rigid economy they kept up appearances to some extent, and still held their heads aloft among their old neighbours. Miss Rivers and the Countess were to be seen at every entertainment within reach of the hired fly. Carry still hoped to marry; indeed, Matilda was not averse to trying her fortune a second time. Every nerve was strained to furnish up their once splendid dresses, and to present a brave, fashionable youthful appearance among the neighbouring elite.

Pauline was very clever with the needle, and most useful to them, and was without delay installed as dressmaker-maid. Day after day she sat in their dressing-room stitch, stitch, stitching till her back ached sorely, and her poor fingers were stiff and numb. Carrie was so particular; her gowns had to be made and remade and altered and fitted half-a-dozen times over till they pleased her. Then Pauline had the satisfaction (!) of dressing her, doing her scanty hair, arranging her flowers, making her bouquet.

It never entered into either of their heads to take her to any of these festivities. She had volunteered in her misery to come home, in any capacity; to come home to be their servant, and they took her promptly at her word, with a vengeance. She took her meals with them, and went to church with them—a little out-of-the-way village church—at which no other gentry worshipped; but, beyond that, they treated her as an inferior in every respect. They had now by some mysterious reasoning arrived at the fact that her mother was not at all in her father's rank of life. No friends had ever sought her grave, no inquiries had been made about her. As to the diamonds they were never mentioned. The fact was, the Count had laid greedy unscrupulous hands on them, and pawned them years ago. Nothing was sacred from him. And Matilda had actually persuaded herself—the wish being father to the thought—that they had come into Mrs. Rivers's hands from some suspicious source! Why had she never worn them?

(To be continued.)

A curious industry in some of the provinces of China is the manufacture of mock money for offering to the dead. The pieces are only half the size of real coins, but the dead are supposed not to know the difference. To make them, tin, hammered out till it is not thicker than the thickest paper, is punched to the size required and pasted on discs of cardboard. A boy then takes the pieces, and with two dies, one representing the one side and the other the reverse, hammers impressions of coins upon them, and the money is ready for use.

UNDER A CLOUD.

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CHAPTER XI.—(continued.)

PERCY FELLOWES hardly knew what he feared or expected, but it was an intense relief to him to see his father in the hall looking out for the doctor, and to notice that Sir George was evidently not in need of medical aid himself.

"What on earth's kept you so long, Harley?" was his impatient greeting. "I sent hours ago."

"I was away at the other end of the parish; your messenger never asked where, or it might have saved time if he had come on to me. But what is the matter?"

"Barbara!"

Percy's heart smote him; dearly as he loved his sister, he had had some very harsh thoughts of her since his interview with Mr. Carpenter. Now, as Dr. Harley prepared to go upstairs, he caught his father's arm and said eagerly,—

"What is it I she seemed as well as possible at breakfast."

Sir George suffered the doctor to go up alone to the room where Lady Fellowes kept watch over her child. He drew his son into the library, and sat down in a large arm chair, as though he had gone through so much in that terrible morning that he could stand no longer.

Percy's presence was evidently a relief to him, and after a moment or two of silence he began his explanation.

"You know we left them still sitting at breakfast, your mother and Barbara, when I brought you here to tell you of that hateful cheque."

Percy nodded.

"She was all right then; she spoke of a long morning in her district. I remember I told her she'd have a sun stroke."

"Well, your mother went to see the housekeeper, I was busy starting you off, and you know, Percy, since her illness Barbara has always gone her own way and chosen her own pursuits. We never missed her, or wondered what she was about. It seems there's not a creature in the house knows just what she did directly after breakfast. Half an hour or so after you started I went out into the grounds. I wanted to give Johnson some orders about the High Cliff flower show next week, and what plants he might exhibit; then he asked me some questions about the new shrubbery, and I went with him down there."

"You know the little wicket gate which leads to the public footpath across the gravel; your dog Jack had followed me, and while I was talking to Johnson he kept sniffing about and barking round that gate. At last, thinking he must be after a rabbit or something, we went up to where he stood yelping, and there, just the other side of the gate, lay Barbara."

Percy started up in horror.

"Barbara!"

"Barbara," repeated Sir George; "white as a lily and cold as death. Johnson's cottage was close by; I scribbled a line there and then sent one of his boys off to Harley, but, like an idiot the lad left it without waiting to know if the doctor was out or in."

"I stayed by Barbara while Johnson went for help, and somehow we got her home and laid her on the sofa in her own room. She has never moved so much as an eyelid since; your mother and her maid are with her trying everything they can think of, but she only lays as one dead, and I—I couldn't stand it, Percy; I couldn't stand there and see my poor girl looking like a corpse, and so I came away to watch for Harley. How did you fall in with him?"

Percy explained; he said not a word of his visit to Hillborough, and Sir George never asked a single question; it was as though his grief for his daughter had swallowed up every other thought.

"You must have lunch," he said at last, "you must be sinking; it's nearly four o'clock."

"I expect you have had nothing either," said Percy, who felt as if he could not swallow a morsel of food, and yet knew he must make the

effort for his father's sake, since they would need all their strength by and by; "we had both better go and have something."

But though the grey-haired butler waited on them with a touching mixture of respect and affection, it was a miserable pretence of a meal, and both were thankful when it was over, and they could get back to the library; Sir George choosing this room because it was nearest to the stairs, and so he might catch the sound of the doctor's footsteps a moment sooner.

"They'd come and tell me if she was dead," he said brokenly. "I can't go up there; when I look at Barbara and remember what she was three years ago, I feel as if I could kill myself for my folly in bringing that villain into the house. I am a miserable old man, Percy, not fit to be a father. I have broken Barbara's heart, and spoilt your whole future."

Percy felt almost crushed with trouble himself, but he did his best to comfort Sir George.

"No one ever had a kinder father than you have been to us," he said bravely, "and Barbara might have made some unfortunate attachment without your bringing Lang here; she is just the sort of nature to love unwisely. I can't for the life of me imagine Barbara engaged to an eligible suitor in a common-place ordinary way, and having a grand wedding with twelve bridesmaids. She was just the girl to have a romance. I know she blames herself bitterly for her infatuation for Lang, but I am sure it would add to her sorrow if you reproached yourself."

Sir George did not answer; his strained, listening ear had caught the sound of Dr. Harley coming downstairs, and he turned eagerly to meet the physician, but there was nothing reassuring in the kind, grave face.

"Tell me the worst," said the poor distracted father. "I can bear any thing but suspense."

"There is no change, and I am afraid Barbara is in a very critical state," said Dr. Harley, who never deceived anyone; "but it is not hopeless and I have come down now to ask if you can throw any light on her strange condition."

Involuntarily Percy moved to the door and closed it. Dr. Harley glanced at him approvingly.

"I have told Lady Fellowes her daughter is in a kind of trance or stupor, brought on by terrible nervous exhaustion consequent on great mental excitement; this is the truth, but I look to you to help me find out what is preying on the poor girl's mind."

"Nothing, I should say, except what happened nearly three years ago," said Sir George. "She has never got over her infatuation for Lang. I don't mean she defends him, I think she fully admits he treated me abominably and deserved exposure."

"She does more than that," said Percy, gravely, "she shrinks from the memory of her attachment to him with a kind of repulsion. My sister may be breaking her heart over a lost ideal, Dr. Harley, but I am confident of one thing, she has got over her love for Lang, her only feeling for him is aversion."

The Doctor looked perplexed.

"You don't share your father's opinion that her disappointment is the sole cause of the change in your sister?"

Percy shook his head.

"I think that Barbara has something on her mind, some present trouble."

"And that is my opinion," replied the physician, gravely, "for weeks and months her nervous system has been under some terrible strain. I suppose she has not corresponded with Robert Lang."

Sir George, indignantly declared Barbara "would be incapable of such a thing." Percy said, more temperately, that "it was impossible, since Lang was in prison."

"He hasn't been in prison all the time since he left here," said the doctor, drily, "and I should stake my professional reputation some communication has passed between them. It is not likely two people would have the same influence over her; outside her own family, she has no intimate friend, yet you can't deny that she has changed perceptibly, even in the last few months."

"I wish you would speak plainly," said poor Sir George, testily, "I hate hints."

"Well, then, I expect I shall offend you, but I am prepared for that. I believe that your daughter Barbara is now suffering from exhaustion, the result of hypnotic influence exercised on her to a terrible extent by that scoundrel, Robert Lang."

Percy started.

"He went in for that sort of thing, I know," the young man said slowly; "hypnotism and mesmerism were favourite hobbies of his. White magic, he used to call them. He tried once to experiment on me, but gave it up in despair, he said my will power was too strong."

"There was too much antagonism between your natures, I expect," said the doctor slowly.

"Hypnotism (excepting in a mild form for purely medical purposes) requires, to be successful, that the person operated on shall either have a weaker will than the operator, or be for the time favourably disposed toward him. Neither condition would exist in your case."

"But Lang is in Africa," groaned poor Sir George, "and my girl's here; besides, she has left off caring for him."

The scientific explanation was beyond the baronet, but to Percy, it made a great deal clear. Dr. Harley's theory was that Robert Lang had abused his confidential position at the Towers to get the fair young daughter of the house entirely under his influence. His "white magic" had probably utterly destroyed her will power, and made her a passive agent in his hands. This explained her infatuation for him, her desire to marry him in defiance of her father's orders.

Dr. Harley argued that this influence once gained could not be affected seriously by time or distance, and that Lang's will had acted on Barbara all through the time of their separation.

"I told you probably you would be angry with me," went on the doctor, "but I believe firmly the true explanation of the mysterious cheques Percy consulted me about a week or two ago lies here. Barbara's handwriting, Sir George, is almost an exact copy of your own. I believe that she, poor girl, in a state of utter unconsciousness, while under this friend's hypnotic spell—gained access to your cheque-book and abstracted the cheques, filling up the counter foils."

"I can't believe it," said Sir George. "I think, if you force me to, I shall never hold up my head again. Percy, you have been to Hillborough today. I suppose you saw the bank manager and questioned him? Tell Dr. Harley his theory is impossible; speak a word in your sister's defence, my boy. Don't you see this makes her out a thief and a forger?"

"Not willingly," said Percy, with deep feeling; "the actions of persons in a hypnotic state are not their own, father. Crime committed then must not be laid to their account."

Sir George looked at him anxiously.

"You heard something at Hillborough, tell me what it was."

Percy told him everything, not forgetting that the description of the lady who carried away the money withdrawn by "Henry Roberts," answered in all respects to Barbara.

Sir George glanced from one to the other, but his trusted much-loved son, his tried friend of twenty years, alike seemed powerless to help or comfort him.

"Must she die?" he asked Dr. Harley, with a choked sob. "Oh, doctor, save her life if it is only that she may tell us how we have misjudged her."

"I will do my best," said the doctor. "You are assuming she has been the instrument in forging these cheques. The strain and agitation of it all spread over a long time is almost enough to account for her collapse; but I think myself there is something more. I believe that a message, or a letter from Lang has reached her today."

"She has had no letter," said Sir George, quickly, "and I don't think convicts are allowed to write."

"I shall stay here for the night," said Dr. Harley. "I am going to see one or two other urgent cases, but I hope to be back in two hours. If consciousness returns it will be about twelve

hours after the seizure, which I put at half-past ten."

"Where are you going, Percy?" asked Sir George, as his son rose to follow Dr. Harley, and the old man's voice said, "don't leave me."

"Only down to the shabby, father, and then perhaps on to the village. I want to make a few inquiries as to whether any strangers have been seen about."

"I'll drive you to the village," said the doctor; "best begin your inquiries there. Start the idea that 'Miss Fellowes was frightened by a tramp,' and people will be glad to tell you all they know. The villagers look on Barbara almost as an angel."

But when they had driven through the lodge gates Dr. Harley asked suddenly.

"Do you feel up to a shock, Percy?"

"Well," answered Mr. Fellowes, slowly; "I've had three pretty bad ones close on each other, so I think I'm pretty well-seasoned to them; but surely, you can't have any more bad news for me."

"Only this—Robert Lang has escaped from prison, and is believed by the African authorities to have sailed in disguise for England."

"When?" the voice was strained, and eager, utterly unlike Percy's usual cheery tones.

"The first steamer sailing after his escape reached England a fortnight ago."

Percy turned to the doctor with a look of speechless horror in his eyes.

"I see it all. He is here and acting on Barbara. No wonder the last two cheques forged were for such increased amounts; it is to supply him with luxuries that he makes my sister act like a common thief; but, Dr. Harley, I will be revenged on him, if there is law and justice in England. If it takes my whole life I will avenge my wrongs and Barbara's on this shameless scoundrel."

Dr. Harley was a man of peace, but he knew all Percy had suffered at Lang's hands, and for the life of him he could not blame the young fellow's desire for revenge.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. MORTON did not pay a second visit to High Cliff Lodge and seek a personal introduction to its fair young mistress; perhaps he thought Miss Durant might resent her chaperon receiving her own friends, and did not wish to risk Mrs. Jocelyn's losing such a charming situation. He wrote to his old acquaintances not many days after his call, much regretting he could not spare time to come over again to High Cliff, but begging if she could gain leave of absence, she would spend a few hours at Durtou; his sister was staying with him there, and would be delighted if Mrs. Jocelyn would lunch with them.

The chaperon told Olive of the invitation, taking it for granted she could not accept it, but Miss Durant insisted on her doing so.

"Why, Mrs. Jocelyn," the heiress said, pleasantly, "surely Alice and I can take care of ourselves for one day; if you wouldn't take a holiday on any other terms, I'd prevail on Miss Armitage to come up and play duenna; but, seriously, we shall get on all right, and I am delighted you should have this little change; you have been looking rather pale lately, and the outing will do you good."

Mabel Jocelyn's heart smote her at the kindly speech; she deserved no generosity or consideration from Miss Durant, for she had shamefully deceived her; in the first place there were pages in her own past which made her quite unfit for the post of companion to two pure, innocent girls. Then, since coming to High Cliff, she had deceived Olive right and left; had pried into her secrets and tampered with her looks; last, but not least, she was even now meditating against her an act of the blackest treachery. So it was hardly wonderful she wished Miss Durant had not been so kind.

She would rather have had an excuse for hating the girl she had so deeply wronged, instead of which she always felt that Olive was one of the most delightful persons she had ever

met, and that but for her own sinful past and the entanglements it had left, she really might have made a fresh start at High Cliff Lodge, and tried to do better.

She started at eleven o'clock, driven by Olive to the station in the little pony-carriage, in spite of her assertion that she could quite well walk. Certainly if she must earn her living she could hardly do so in a pleasanter way than as Miss Durant's companion.

But Mabel Jocelyn hated restraint of all kinds, she hated even the quiet order and method which must be the rule in a well-governed household; she had been used to independence, constant change and excitement. To dine to-day at a Regent-street restaurant, to-morrow off a dry crust; to wear silks and satins one week, to pawn them the next. Such a life was far more congenial to Mabel than the monotony of her present existence.

She had married her husband, poor Edgar, Lady Tollington's only brother, as a sort of experiment; his boyish enthusiasm and intense devotion had touched the worldly coquette just a little, and made her think perhaps there was something in domestic happiness after all, and that she might as well try it.

The experiment was a terrible one for poor Edgar. Mabel soon tired of a quiet life, she rushed madly into every sort of extravagance; she loaded him with debts; she drove him into sin, and when fairly desperate he cut the thread of his difficulties by taking his own life.

He rested in a dishonoured grave, and the woman who had dragged him to it calmly went back to her maiden name, and threw herself on the protection of her half-brother, whom she loved as much as it was in her nature to love at all.

Poor Barbara Fellowes had not been mistaken when she said Mrs. Jocelyn's voice and manner reminded her of Robert Lang. The children of one mother, the two were strikingly alike in character and in many subtle touches of expression which a stranger might pass unnoticed, but which struck Barbara at once.

This was the woman Mrs. Wyndham had selected as chaperon to her orphan niece. If only she had exercised the commonest care and written to Lady Tollington, Mrs. Jocelyn would never have been seen at High Cliff Lodge. The sister of a convict; the betrayer of poor Edgar Jocelyn—a female gambler, who boasted of the men she had ruined—this was the woman whom gentle, credulous Lady Fellowes pronounced "charming," but to whom her children, with clearer judgment, had both taken a marvellous aversion.

Mabel drew a breath of relief when she had parted from Olive Durant. It was like champagne to her to be away from the pretty home which she called a prison, for a few brief hours. She had no longer to utter moral sentiments and act a part; she was free to be her own worldly frivolous self.

Durton was only the second station from High Cliff, so her journey was soon accomplished. Mr. Morton stood on the platform awaiting her, and welcomed her cordially, though he did not notice her uplifted face, evidently expecting a warmer greeting than a mere handshake.

"Oh, Bertie, this is delightful," she said, when they were clear of the station. "It's three whole years since I had a real talk with you. Oh, I don't count the other day at the Lodge, when that meddlesome old maid and her brother interrupted us."

Mr. Morton smiled.

"You are as rash as ever, Mab; but, look here, you'll ruin everything if you are not careful. For the present, at any rate, I must call you Mrs. Jocelyn, and it would really be safer if you didn't use my Christian name."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"No one will suspect. They all think you are in Africa."

"The consequences for me will be uncommonly awkward if the truth's discovered," he said, gravely, "for my sake, dear, be careful."

Perhaps that little word "dear," influenced her. She shrugged her shoulders but made no further protest.

"And where's your sister, Mr. Morton, who would be so delighted to make my acquaintance, or was that a blind?"

"You are my sister," said Morton, gravely. "I've moved into very comfortable lodgings where the landlady is as deaf as a post. I agreed to put up with that slight inconvenience quite amiably."

Mab laughed.

"You are quite sure her infirmity is real?"

"Certain—how long can you stay?"

"I must catch the six o'clock train back to High Cliff. Oh!" as he turned in at the gate of a very pretty villa, "I see you know how to make yourself comfortable."

"Supplies have come in since I saw you. I could even screw you out a bank note or two if you're hard up."

But Mab, wonderful to relate, declined. She said she could manage with what she had till her salary was due.

"You ought to keep a good sum by you in case of sudden need," she said, practically; then, as the landlady appeared, she shouted one or two civil speeches, and then having taken off her things she sat down in Mr. Morton's sitting-room to—as she phrased it—talk business.

"I suppose you're safe now you're on English ground, they couldn't take you back."

"They could fast enough if they found me; but you may make sure of one thing, Mab, they will never take me alive."

Mabel Jocelyn trembled. She understood what he meant only too well.

"Was it so dreadful?"

"It was beyond description. Don't talk of it. I dream sometimes I am back there, and the agony of it always wakes me."

She looked him full in the face, and asked quietly,—

"What do you mean to do? Which of the two shall you trust?"

"I shall trust no one but you," he said, gravely. "It wouldn't be safe. I only wish to goodness you hadn't pitched your tent so near the Fellowes. You must have known High Cliff was the most dangerous place in England for me."

"Yes; but then I didn't expect you to be in England for seven years, and I had to take what I could get. After all, I shouldn't wonder if you were safer here. The very place you were hunted out of, the very place where your most implacable enemies live, is surely the last where the police would look for you."

He winced at the mention of the police, though he told her there was some sense in what she said.

"And now I want to hear everything," said Mabel. "Tell me the whole story of your life since we parted three years ago."

"That's a large order," he said, smiling—there was something terribly cruel about his smile. "I went to South Africa because I had to go somewhere, and I thought the Yankees might prove too sharp for me. Thanks to Sir George Fellowes' banker, I carried with me a handsome sum, and I managed to get remittances from the same source since."

"How!" exclaimed his sister. "The story goes here that the moment you proposed to his daughter he turned against you, and now the worst word in his mouth isn't bad enough for you."

"I daresay. Nevertheless a good amount of his money has been contributed to my support. My word, how well he'd be if he found it out. Well, I liked the colony very much, and it received 'Vance Carlyon' with open arms. I went everywhere and received as much hospitality as though I'd been a nobleman, and then the prettiest girl in Port Agnes, the only child of David Lester, the richest man in the town, took a fancy to me. I sent her my photograph, Mabel, and you must own she is worth looking at."

"She is the breathing image of Miss Durant, who came from Port Agnes last January. I was going to tell you so the other day when those meddling Armitages interrupted us. Bertie, I'd stake a good deal that my employer is your old love, Olive Lester."

"I didn't dare make any inquiries in the

Colony," he said ruefully; "it would not have been safe; a man on the voyage home told me Lester was dead and he had shipped his daughter off to England the week before. Surely there couldn't be two Olives in Port Agnes, both of them heiresses; besides, I knew every girl in society there, but what in the world made her change her name?"

"I believe Mr. Durant went to Africa 'under a cloud,'" said Mabel, sagaciously, "I was so sure the heiress was your Olive, that I have been trying to unravel something of her history; of course I never thought you would be here for a good six years to come. My little scheme was to come down on the young lady for a nice little sum of hush money for keeping the secret of her engagement to a convict if she ever took a fancy to an English suitor."

"She won't do that."

"Well I am instructed by her relations to discourage any matrimonial intentions of hers, but she's a very beautiful girl, and if only she weren't so spiritless would be very attractive."

"She will never encourage anyone else, because she believes herself bound to me," said Robert Lang, confidently.

Mabel shrugged her shoulders.

"Barbara Fellowes and Olive Durant may both believe themselves engaged to you, but you can't possibly carry on with both at the same time you must choose between them, which brings me back to the question I asked you first—which shall you trust?"

"Neither," said Robert Lang decidedly. "If you mean by 'trust' revealing my present abode; but I don't see why they shouldn't both contribute to my necessities. They are both rich."

"Olive is enormously rich," admitted Mrs. Jocelyn. "Miss Fellowes has nothing of her own."

Mr. Lang hesitated for a moment; there were two details he had carefully kept back from his sister, and which he had no intention of telling her; this made his confidences the least bit difficult.

"I wish you and Olive hadn't settled here," he said fretfully. "Don't you see, Mabel, if once she and Barbara compare notes I am lost. While each believes me her own devoted slave, I am tolerably safe to secure assistance from either."

Mrs. Jocelyn shook her head.

"I haven't unlocked drawers and read private letters for nothing, Bertie; Olive Durant detests the man through whom she was forced to leave her father in Africa. No names are given in the letters, but I have no doubt you are the individual."

"Neither have I."

"An old Dr. Evans has specially warned her to avoid all places where she is likely to meet colonials; I should say that instead of welcoming you with open arms, she would take flight at your approach."

"Or allow me a handsome income to leave her in peace, that's my game, Mabel."

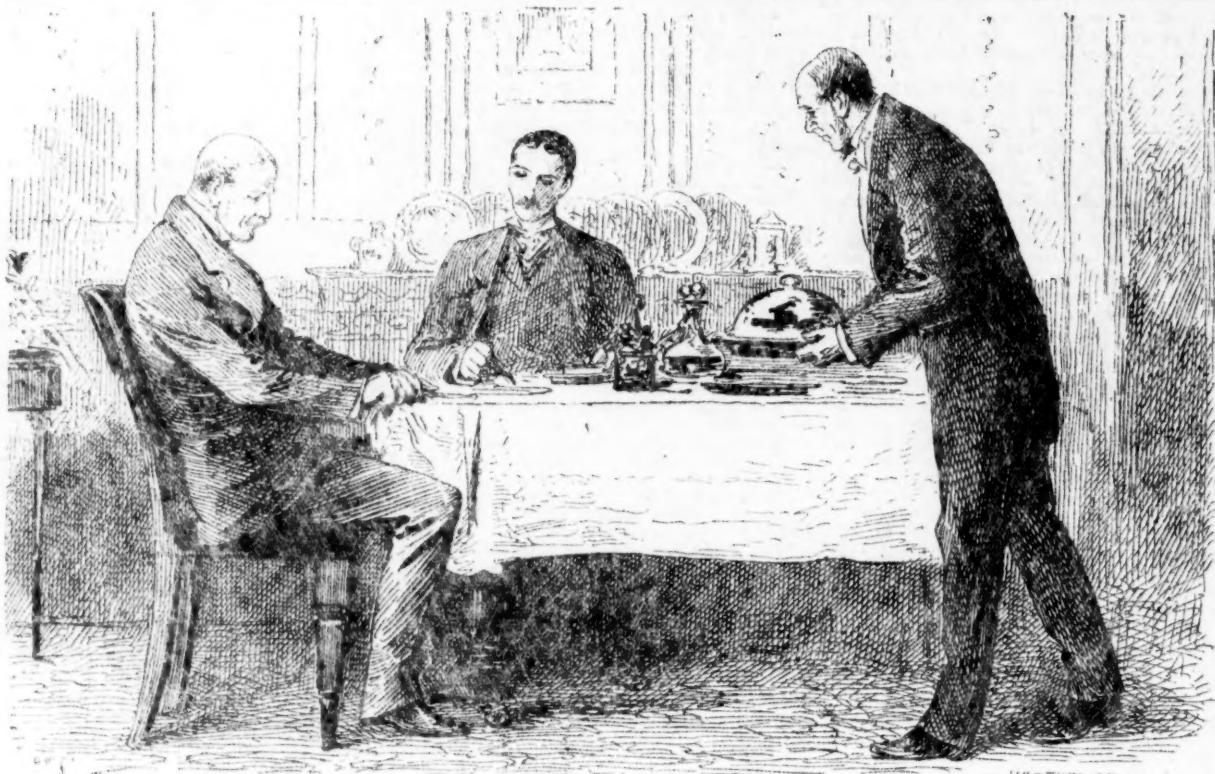
"But how if she betrays you to the police instead?" inquired that prudent widow.

"She won't. She must never see me in this disguise, must never guess I am your old friend Andrew Morton. You must help me, Mabel; I rely on you to get me smuggled into the Lodge somehow, and then at night, after the servants have retired, I shall appear to Olive. I shall ask five hundred pounds at first, then, if she refuses why, I'm strong enough to silence her and make off before she can arouse the house. But, mark my word, Mabel, she will not refuse; she has an intensely proud nature, she will pay a heavy price rather than let it come out that she was engaged to me in defiance of her father's wishes, and that only my unlucky arrest prevented our taking flight together."

Mrs. Jocelyn considered for a few minutes.

"Perhaps you are right, but, Bertie, it seems to me you'll always lead a life of hide and seek; you can't live openly in England again."

"Not under my own name, but then I'm not particularly attached to it. I shouldn't care to have to wear Mr. Morton's heavy beard, moustache and spectacles for the rest of my days, but in a few months when the hue and cry after Robert Lang has died out, I shall not need to



IT WAS A MISERABLE PRETENCE OF A MEAL, AND SIR GEORGE AND PERCY WERE BOTH THANKFUL WHEN IT WAS OVER.

disguise myself; in London or in any of the big towns I can live very comfortably on the income furnished by Miss Durant; you shall come and keep house for me, Mab, we'll have a good time together, old girl!"

"And you think she will go on paying?"

"I am sure of it; when a woman once begins paying hush money she never knows when to stop, and luckily this girl has no male relations to look after her."

"She has an uncle who is a very sharp lawyer," said Mrs. Jocelyn, "but as she particularly dislikes him perhaps he won't count, and then you have the chance of her marriage."

"She won't marry; I'm not sure but what it would be a good thing for me if she did, she'd have to bribe me then not to make painful revelations to her husband."

Mabel faced round on him suddenly.

"Her husband might be a person you stood in considerable dread of yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's easy to see that Percy Fellowes has a strong leaning towards Olive. If she wasn't an heiress I think it would be a match, but he is poor and has romantic, quixotic notions about not marrying a rich wife."

"I'm glad to hear it, long may he keep them. Mabel, you used to be pretty clever; don't you think you could make a breach between Olive and the Fellowes?"

"I am afraid not. You see there is only one member of the family open to my influence. Both Barbara and her brother have the bad taste to dislike me; Sir George I dare not meet at close quarters since you once introduced me to him in London, and he may have a good memory for faces."

"So he may! Well, there's Olive; get her to think the Fellowes are after her money; persuade her to snub them ever so little, and the breach will follow to a certainty."

"I don't think I've influence enough with her. I'll do my best, but she has almost a filial affection for Sir George and my lady, while she

never forgets that Barbara saved her life. To part her from the family at the Towers seems to me well-nigh impossible."

"But you'll try and work it?"

"I'll do my best."

He told her later of the hardships he had suffered in prison, and how he made his escape assisted by a warder.

"The man had not a penny saved and I knew that he was far advanced in decline; he had only one child, a girl, and he wanted money to provide for her. I knew there'd be three or four hundred I could lay my hands on if we got safely to Cape Town, and I promised him the whole except fifty pounds; he jumped at it, but it was an awfully risky thing to do."

"As soon as we got within reach of shops I rigged him out as an invalid gentleman. I stained my face and hands to look like an 'off-coloured man,' as they call the half-castes, and came to England as his valet."

"I didn't cheat him of a penny, Mab, and he went up North to find his daughter in the best of spirits. She's a child of twelve or thirteen, and he left her with her mother's family, while he went to Africa to seek his fortune."

"He'll have three hundred pounds now to give her when he dies; it's a satisfaction to him, and after all I've saved the colony the expense of maintaining me for half-a-dozen years, so they ought to be grateful to me."

The time passed rapidly, and the two birds of prey planned their programme very minutely, for both felt it would not do for the chaperon to ask for another holiday, while Robert Lang had a dread of trusting any of their secrets to pen and ink.

Mabel was to keep quiet for a few days, and try to ingratiate herself more and more into Olive's confidence; as soon as the cousins had fixed a day for any expedition that would take them from home for at least two hours, Mrs. Jocelyn was to send a blank sheet of paper addressed to Mr. Morton (this would tell no tales even if opened), he would start at once for High Cliff

and call openly at the Lodge to see the chaperon; the widow was to allow the servant to suppose she had let him out at the front door herself; really she would conduct him to her own room which was near Olive's, and leave him locked up in a light closet where she was accustomed to hang dresses and other garments. The vigil would be a long one, five or six hours at the very least, but Robert Lang was ready to risk something.

Mabel had also to unfasten the drawing-room shutters so that her brother could make his escape through the French windows of that room unsuspected by the sleeping household.

Lang believed that Olive would yield to his threats and promise the payment he demanded, but in case of her proving obdurate, he was to provide himself with a bottle of chloroform, so as to stifle any cries she might utter for help before they could reach and arouse the servants.

Oh, it was a cruel scheme; it was cruel and pitiless of the man who had already brought such a heavy cloud on the girl's young life, to try and still further blight her future; cowardly to threaten one whose only fault was that she had loved him not wisely but too well. The woman's part though was baser still; she was eating Olive's bread, she had received countless kindnesses at her hands, and yet she was ready to betray her.

A faint remorse did steal into the widow's heart when Olive came to welcome her on her return to the Lodge, hoped she had enjoyed herself, and said Mr. Morton and his sister would be most welcome if they changed their minds and could spare time to pay a visit to High Cliff.

But Mabel's conscience was so seared she soon stifled its accusing voice.

She went down to dinner with a gay smile on her face; she was the life of the little party all through the evening, and Miss Durant said, laughingly, she thought Mrs. Jocelyn possessed a charm to drive away low spirits.

Poor trusting Olive!

(To be continued.)



"I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR THE ILL-BEHAVIOUR OF MY DOG," SAID MR. NEVIN IN A LOW VOICE.

THE WORLD AGAINST HIM.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

WITH the sea on its left, the Somersetshire hills on its right, and surrounded by miles of a gently, undulating plain, was situated the beautiful but old-fashioned and sleepy town of Barton.

It formed an ideal picture of ease and quiet, and contented prosperity, and its whole appearance constituted a standing reproach to the hurry and bustle, the everlasting toil and strife of the outside world.

No one hurried in Barton; no one struggled; no one ever thought of striking out a new line for himself; everyone was content to follow in the footsteps of his father, and to do his work decently and soberly in the old-fashioned way.

Once, several years previously to the commencement of our story, a daring speculator had established himself in the Blue Lion and had portrayed to the listening natives the wonderful advantages to be obtained by the introduction of a new railway line, and the building of a station in the immediate neighbourhood; but he talked to deaf ears.

He pictured Barton a busy centre of trade, with magnificent shops, handsome streets, a large population, increased wealth and work and wages, which would speedily accrue, but the honest rustics only shook their heads stolidly, and doubted whether, after all, they could be better off than they were in their present condition.

Besides, it was quite certain that the Families would object to such a change, and the Families were paramount in Barton.

These worthies did not live in Barton itself, but their estates formed an outer circle round the little town, almost every rood of which belonged to one or other of them.

They were very conservative and exclusive,

these lords of the soil, and with one exception were the literal descendants of men who had owned the estates from time immemorial.

The only new-comer was Robert Carr, who lived at the Laurels, and even he represented the third generation of the Carrs of Barton.

He was a short, spare man, with a florid complexion and sharp, keen eyes, and gave one the idea of a mixture of a gentleman farmer and a lawyer.

His two daughters, Nettie and Rosa, were the admiration of the Barton youth, and the envy of all the maidens for miles around.

Major Bankes of the Cedars had once called them the Carr Diamonds, and the pretty conceit was by no means inappropriate.

They were tall, fair girls, with dancing blue eyes, and an abundance of soft, silken-textured flaxen hair.

Their father, as was perhaps natural, was inordinately proud of them.

In general he was a kind-hearted man, but he possessed a hasty, choleric disposition which often led him into saying disagreeable things that he afterwards regretted.

The breakfast-room at the Laurels was a large, comfortable apartment overlooking a nicely-trimmed lawn, while the French windows were festooned with a wealth of lovely Gloire de Dijon roses, the rich perfume of which was borne into the room on the soft morning air.

Nettie, as usual, was presiding, with Rosa on her right hand, and her father facing her.

He was reading a letter, for the post had just arrived, and his face wore an air of ill-humour.

The girls exchanged glances as he laid the paper down, but neither of them spoke, for they knew by experience that the family barometer pointed to storm.

Like most men who consider they have a grievance, Mr. Carr was forced to vent it, and finding that his daughters preserved strict silence, he said gloomily, and as if about to pronounce somebody's death sentence,—

"That letter is from Prideaux, the lawyer, he

promised to keep me informed of what was going on."

"Yes, papa," responded Nettie, demurely, but with just the faintest suspicion of a twinkle in her blue eyes, while Rosa's face wore an expression of innocent bewilderment.

"Yes, papa," echoed her father, ironically, "upon my word I don't believe you care one single atom."

"Oh, indeed, we do, papa," interposed Rosa, archly, "we care very much indeed, only, you see, we do not happen to understand what Mr. Prideaux has written about."

Mr. Carr had just removed the top of his egg, but at this answer he laid down his spoon in despair.

"What could he write about?" he asked, impressively, "surely at present there is but one subject of interest for us. His letter informs me that the Wyndhams has been sold."

Rosa felt inclined to clap her pretty hands, but meeting her father's eye, she refrained and postponed that demonstration of feeling until in the privacy of her room.

The Wyndhams was the estate adjoining Mr. Carr's property, and for some time had been untenanted.

John Wyndham the last direct representative of the family had died a bachelor, and the estate had passed into the possession of a northern manufacturer, who, having a country seat of his own, had thrown his newly-acquired property into the market, to the intense disgust of the Barton aristocracy in general and of Mr. Carr in particular.

"Does Mr. Prideaux tell you the name of our new neighbour?" asked Nettie presently, "after all, dear, you know they may be very nice people, I'm sure they cannot be much worse than the late Mr. Wyndham."

Her father passed the letter across the table, saying,—

"There, read for yourself; he says very little, and that little is far from satisfactory."

Nettie took the letter and read it aloud.

"DEAR MR. CARR,

"According to promise I hasten to send you the first definite information I have received concerning the sale of the Wyndhams.

"The property, I understand, has just changed hands at a very fair market price, and the new proprietor will take possession at once.

"He is a Mr. Brander Nevin, a stranger to me, and in fact no one seems to know much of him. He has apparently neither friends nor relatives, but is popularly supposed to be enormously wealthy, having made his money in Australia.

"I have not seen him myself, but Perkins tells me he is decidedly good-looking, but reserved and of a melancholy temperament.

Faithfully yours,

"LEONARD R. PRIDEAUX."

"I feel quite interested in this mysterious Mr. Nevin," exclaimed Nettie to her sister later in the day, as the two girls sauntered into their beautiful garden. "I do hope papa will not put on his absurd airs, and frighten him away from here."

"Papa is a great deal too dogmatic," answered Rosa decisively, "and if this Mr. Nevin wishes to be friendly with us, I shall be friendly with him."

"That's right, my dear," said Nettie, laughingly, "assert yourself, it will do papa good." Then in an altered voice, "there is that odious Pollie Bankes. What can she want?"

"Nettie!" said her sister, in a tone of reproof, "you are as bad as papa; why should you call the girl odious? I confess it does not seem to me that she deserves the title."

"That is because you are too good to understand her, Rosa; I know her better than you, she is deceitful and a mischief-maker. But, however, here she is and we must make the best of it."

The girl of whom Nettie Carr spoke so severely now approached. In some respects she was not unlike the sisters.

Her complexion was fair, fairer even than theirs, and the whiteness of her cheeks was heightened by a delicate, peach-like colour. A mass of fluffy, golden-tinted hair covered a well-shaped head, and a stray lock or two peeped out from under a pretty sailor hat, and lay negligently over the white forehead.

Her eyes, too, were blue, deep in colour and fringed with heavy lashes. They rarely opened widely but remained half closed, giving the girl a sleepy, dreamy appearance, which, in Nettie Carr's estimation, her real character belied.

She greeted the sisters with a little purr of satisfaction.

"Simmons!"—Simmons was the housekeeper at the Laurels—"told me you were here, and I would not permit her to send for you: it is a pity to shut one's self in the house on such a beautiful day, is it not?—and this is such a charming spot. That is the one thing I envy you at the Laurels, your beautiful garden! I sometimes wish I could steal that solemn old Scotch gardener of yours."

Rosa laughed heartily.

"I fear the theft would do you but little service," she said. "Andrew is a perfect autocrat and brooks no interference, I do not think the Major and he would get on at all well together."

"Yet he succeeds in pleasing Mr. Carr!" with a slight approach to sarcasm.

"Yes!" calmly, "but that is because papa accepts the inevitable. Andrew is the sole master in the garden and a terrible martinet. But he is a real treasure nevertheless."

The girls sauntered on, down the broad path, and presently the new-comer said with a smile—

"By the way, have you heard about the Wyndhams? It will be pleasant for you to have so eligible a neighbour. Poor John Wyndham's place is sold you know, and the new owner is expected to take possession at almost any time. His name is Brander Nevin. Kelvey tells me—Kelvey came in with papa to luncheon—that he is quite young, good-looking, and possessed of fabulous wealth. He has a gold-mine, or mint, or something of that sort—"

Pollie Bankes's ideas of everything outside society were extremely hazy—"in Australia, and it brings him in more money than he knows what to do with."

Nettie smiled.

"It is a pity Lord Kelvey does not take to novel writing," she said, sweetly, "he has a splendid imagination; I am sure he would make a sensation."

Rosa shot a reproving glance at her sister, but Pollie laughed outright.

"Oh, that is delightful, I must tell Kelvey that, he does so love a joke, even at his own expense."

"But, seriously," she continued, "I think it is really very nice to have this Mr. Nevin for a neighbour; it is exceedingly dreary with the Wyndhams empty, and I, for one, am ready to vote our new neighbour an acquisition. I foresee all kinds of pleasures; garden-parties, lawn-tennis, picnics, in the summer, and in the winter we shall scarcely be able to recognise ourselves."

"Do you remember that proverb about the eggs and the chicken?" interposed Rosa, gravely, "I think I would not reckon too firmly upon what is to happen. This Mr. Nevin may be a hermit, for aught we know. Indeed, for my part, I think it extremely likely, and that he has bought the Wyndhams as a kind of prison, in which to seclude himself. I cannot conceive of a man, fond of society, voluntarily burying himself at Barton."

Pollie looked blank.

"Oh, Rosa," she cried petulantly, "you do look at things in such a horrid way. Here I have been promising myself all sorts of good times, and you throw cold water on them all. I do believe you are only trying to tease me."

"That's it," exclaimed Nettie, promptly, "she is making fun, though her face does wear such a serious air."

Rosa kept silent, and presently the conversation led into other channels, until the girls strolled back to the house for five o'clock tea.

"It is unfortunate that you do not like Pollie Bankes," said Rosa to her sister, as they sat that night, wrapped in their dressing-gowns, looking from the window of Nettie's bedroom.

"Why?" asked the latter, in astonishment.

"Because we shall probably be honoured with a great deal of her company in the future," and seeing that her sister did not yet understand the drift of her remark, she added, "have you forgotten our proximity to the Wyndhams?"

"Oh," said Nettie, opening her blue eyes widely, "now I begin to see. Well, at all events it will matter little to us, for papa does not seem to regard our promised neighbour in the light of an acquisition, whatever Pollie's views may be."

Rosa kissed her sister good-night, and retired to her own room, while Nettie continued to sit and dream in the moonlight, innocent, happy, girlish fancies, undimmed by so much as a shadow of the misery which was advancing slowly, but steadily towards her.

CHAPTER II.

THE news that the Wyndhams had been sold spread rapidly through the little town, and excited considerable discussion, not only amongst the gentry, but also amongst the tradesmen of the place.

Scarcely any other subject was broached in the parlour of the Blue Lion for a whole week.

"They tell me," said Mr. Martin Drake, the retired linen-draper, as he puffed soberly at his pipe, "that he has enough money to buy up Barton, with all the estates in the neighbourhood thrown in."

"And began life as an office boy at half-a-crown a week," added his friend Parkes the local butcher.

"All the more credit to him," exclaimed a little man named Potter, who sold boots and shoes, and who occasionally exhibited strange Radical tendencies. "If he has the money and spends the money, that's the main thing for us."

"Ah! but will he spend?" asked Mr. Drake, "that's the point," and about this there was a great difference of opinion.

One party, led by the retired linen draper inclined to the belief that, like many newly-rich people, he would button up his pockets closely, and that Barton would be little the better for his patronage.

Those, however, who held this view formed the minority, the general opinion being that in order to establish his position as the equal of the Families, he would lavish his wealth freely.

"Mark my words," exclaimed the portly landlord oracularly, "he will order Pain's very best carriage, and come driving through here with four horses and outriders, to let us understand he is no ordinary person. The Blue Lion will not be half good enough for him, you trust me."

They did trust him, and apparently with reason, for, as the days wore on, no command arrived at that famous hotel to convey Mr. Nevin from the neighbouring station, and private opinion set in steadily towards the four horses and outriders, which the landlord of the Blue Lion had prophesied.

The housekeeper at the Wyndhams had received a short note, signed Brander Nevin, requesting that she would have a couple of rooms prepared, as the writer might be down on any day, but no alteration had been made, no fresh servants engaged, no new furniture sent down, and the stables and coach-house still stood empty.

One afternoon, Nettie, who had been to the town on some matter of business, was proceeding quietly homeward, along the beautiful country lanes, pausing now and then to pluck a wild rose from the hedge, when she was suddenly startled by the appearance of a large, black dog, which came bounding towards her.

She was not by any means a timid girl, but for the moment she lost her nerve, the apparition was so entirely unexpected.

She had taken off her glove, the better to gather the wild flowers, and the creature rubbed his rough tongue along the white hand.

Just then she heard a voice exclaim,—

"Down, Pluto, down, sir, you have forgotten your manners."

And turning round, she found herself face to face with a complete stranger, who was evidently the dog's master.

He was a tall man, with a clear but dark complexion, large earnest black eyes which wore an expression of habitual melancholy, and regular, pleasing features.

His hair was short, crisp and dark, and he had a full beard, of the same colour.

He raised his hat with a certain old-world courtesy, very different from the uncouth abruptness one so often sees at the present day.

"I must apologise for the ill-behaviour of my dog," he said, in a low voice and with a winning smile, which Nettie afterwards confided to her sister was good to see, "though his rudeness really resulted from a clumsy attempt to pay you a compliment. Pluto is very reserved in his friendships, and he doubtless thinks that you should feel honoured by such a singular mark of esteem."

"He is a magnificent animal," replied Nettie, enthusiastically, "and I am duly gratified at being included in the list of his friends."

"You are quite sure he has not alarmed you?"

"Oh, yes; indeed, I am not easily frightened."

She glanced at him cautiously. Why did he not go away? He was palpably a gentleman, and by all the rules of good breeding, he ought now to withdraw.

He had come to her assistance, had apologised for his dog, and the incident was at an end.

"Pardon me," he said, breaking a somewhat awkward silence, "but if you live in the neighbourhood, you might perhaps be able to direct me to a place called the Wyndhams. It will sound strange, I suppose," he added thoughtfully, "I am going to live at the Wyndhams, and yet I actually do not know the whereabouts

of my new home. My name is Nevin and I have just walked from Bealey."

Nettie felt sure that her face had become red. How exceedingly strange and yet how exceedingly commonplace, she thought, to meet the owner of the Wyndhams in this simple manner.

And what ought she to do? They were both going the same way; in fact he would have to pass the entrance gate of the Laurels; should she give him the direction and allow him to pass on, or accompany him as far as her own house?

At length she looked into his face with a sunny smile.

"Allow me to welcome you to your new home, Mr. Nevin," she said frankly, "you are the gentleman of whom papa has spoken. We are your nearest neighbours, we live at the Laurels, and papa's name is Robert Carr."

Again he raised his hat courteously. "I am indeed fortunate," he said gallantly, "and more especially since it is fortune and not design that has brought me here."

She laughed merrily. "One does not usually trust to fate to choose one's house," she cried gaily, "though perhaps the arrangement would work equally well, and it certainly saves a great deal of trouble."

The pained expression in his eyes grew more intense, and he sighed heavily.

"To me," he said, "it matters little where I dwell: all places are alike."

She gazed at him mystified.

For one in his position, she thought he spoke very curiously. Young, rich, strong, handsome—for he was certainly handsome, what had he to do with care and trouble?

Was Rosa's jocular prophecy going to turn out correct? Was he really a misanthrope, shutting himself up from his fellow men, brooding maybe over some fancied wrong?

His appearance did not give one that impression, but—ah, they were at the Laurels, she must reserve her speculations until later.

Giving him the necessary directions, she bade him farewell, and turned in at the gate, while he walked slowly on, mechanically patting his dog's head.

"What a beautiful girl!" he murmured to himself, "and as good as she is beautiful, if one were to judge from her appearance. How strange that I should have met her, right on the threshold, as it were, of my new life! The face haunts me and yet to what purpose? This is sheer folly; what have I to do with a good and beautiful girl? Come, Pluto, old fellow, you need not turn your head, for the dog was gazing back along the road as if in expectation, 'your new friend has disappeared, and we must push on to our fresh house.'"

Banishing his melancholy he broke into a quick, swinging stride, and the dog jumped around him barking joyously.

"Rosa," said Nettie suddenly to her sister, as they sat in the drawing-room that night after dinner, "I have seen and spoken to Mr. Nevin," and she briefly related what had occurred during the afternoon.

"He is very handsome," she concluded, "but oh, so sad! I think he must have some secret sorrow preying upon his mind."

"Do you know, dear," responded her sister sagely, "I believe you are extremely romantic, and conjure up all sorts of fanciful visions in that little brain of yours. Why should Mr. Nevin be sad, I wonder? I expect he would laugh heartily enough if he could hear you talking now. What a little goose it is," and she stroked the girl's hair lovingly.

"Wait until you have seen him, then you will be of my opinion."

"You are not afraid of his locking himself up at the Wyndhams?" mischievously.

"No; he is not that kind of man, he will live his life, quietly perhaps, but bravely, as he may strive to disguise the fact his existence is embittered by some heavy sorrow; of that I am sure."

Rosa looked at her sister suspiciously.

"It appears to me, Nettie," she said, "that you have begun to take a warm interest in this Mr. Nevin, do not lose your heart to him, my dear, it may prove awkward."

Nettie blushed furiously.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I have not been in his company a quarter-of-an-hour, and you talk as if I had fallen in love with the man."

"Do not be angry, dear, I was but joking; perhaps I may fall in love with him myself, but if the subject displeases you, let us change it; come and try over this song."

Nettie willingly complied with her sister's request, but all the evening the sad, noble face with its look of patient suffering, was ever before her, haunting her as in a dream.

The news of Nevin's arrival rapidly spread through the district, and the next afternoon, the Carr girls had a visit from Major Bankes' daughter.

"Have you heard," she asked, "that the new master of the Wyndhams has taken possession of his property? Is it true, do you think?"

"Without a doubt," answered Rosa, demurely, "since he himself gave the information to Nettie!"

Pollie turned to the other sister.

"Have you really seen him? What is he like? Is he a gentleman?"

"Yes," with a little expression of disgust, "I have seen him, and he is evidently a gentleman."

"Is he young?"

"Really, Pollie, I am afraid you must restrain your impatience until you have an opportunity of judging for yourself. I did not ask his age."

"Hush!" whispered Rosa, warningly, "here is papa, and I believe he is bringing a stranger with him; wonders will never cease, it must be Mr. Nevin himself. He must be worth knowing if papa brings him here."

Before either of her companions had time to reply, Mr. Carr came in sight, and Nettie saw that he was accompanied by the man she had met in the lane.

Pluto was marching gravely at his heels, but suddenly he rushed forward with a sharp, joyous bark, and placed his huge black head in Nettie's lap.

"Pluto has a good memory," exclaimed his master with a glance of satisfaction, after Mr. Carr's formal introduction, "he is endeavouring to make amends for his rudeness yesterday."

"I think not, he knows I have forgiven that little breach of manners," and as she patted his glossy head, the dog looked into her face with his large, wistful brown eyes.

Pollie darted a keen glance from one to the other; the intimacy between these two had advanced far, for so short a time.

Presently she turned to Brander with a bewitching smile.

"It is too early yet, I suppose, to inquire what you think of your new home, Mr. Nevin," she said prettily, "I trust it may not fall below your expectations."

"It cannot well do that," he answered gravely, "since I had formed none. I fear you will consider me only half civilised when I confess that I thought of nothing but a quiet country house, with a high wall round the grounds."

"That is but a poor compliment to your neighbours, is it not?" she said, with a pretty pout. "I hope you do not intend to shut yourself up at the Wyndhams, we cannot afford to lose your society, you know."

He bowed gallantly.

"Even were I a veritable hermit," he said, "I fear such attractions as these around me would prove far too powerful for me to withstand."

"Ah! Mr. Nevin, you have at least learned how to flatter," and she laughed again, showing her white even teeth.

Pollie Bankes was a clever girl, keen to make the most of her opportunities, and she did not fail to take the advantage which this chance meeting offered to exercise her talents.

The sisters understood her manoeuvres but were too proud to interfere, and so it happened that when Brander Nevin left the Laurels he had found the opportunity to exchange scarcely a dozen words with the beautiful girl whose simple presence sent the warm blood coursing rapidly through his veins.

CHAPTER III.

FROM the time of Brander Nevin's first introduction to the Laurels it was noticed by the curious in Barton that the young man became a frequent visitor to Mr. Carr's house.

He was still quiet and reserved—ah, one might almost have said, in general society, but when alone with the Carrs he opened out considerably, and proved himself a clever and agreeable companion. He had met with many strange adventures during the course of his wild life in Australian experiences.

The place of his birth, the home of his childhood, the events of his early years were all carefully placed in the background and never mentioned.

With this exception no fault could be found with the master of the Wyndhams. He was, as Nettie had said, evidently a gentleman, and if he had a sorrow he did not obtrude it on the world.

To the intense surprise of the Barton worthies, Mr. Carr extended to him the heartiest welcome, and expressed the liveliest satisfaction at his visits. But then, as Pollie Bankes sneeringly remarked, he had two unmarried daughters, and one did not often get the chance of angling for so rich a prize as Brander Nevin, a sentiment which was heartily applauded by her audience. For it must be confessed that the young man was not popular amongst his neighbours, who looked upon his evident reluctance to join in their society as a personal insult.

Lord Kelver, in particular, was greatly offended. After long consideration he had generously decided to overlook the fact that the new-comer was a *parvenu*, a mere upstart, a man who, though possessed of enormous wealth, probably never had a grandfather, and receive him as an equal. And now, to his intense amazement, the fellow, as he irreverently called him, showed not the least appreciation of his lordship's condescension and was not even ordinarily grateful.

As a matter of fact, Brander Nevin was extremely averse to going into any society at all, and even his visits to the Carrs were not made without considerable hesitation on his part.

"This will never do," he said to himself one evening when walking back from the Laurels,—

"I must go away. I am acting foolishly and falsely as well. Oh! Nettie, how you will despise me some day; how your beautiful eyes will flash with scorn as they gaze into mine, and yet, my darling, I cannot tear myself away. I cannot go where I shall never see that beautiful face again, and yet what a wretched business it is!"

It was for him, indeed, a luckless passion. Unconsciously he had fallen in love with this sweet, graceful girl, and the dead weight of the past forbade his marrying her.

What a terrible thing that past sometimes is! How it haunts us, clinging to us, dogging our footsteps; confronts us at every turn, throws over us its huge black shadow, which, like some poisonous miasma, saps our very life-blood.

Heaven help the man who sees his present happiness swallowed up in the gloom of the dead years!

Nearly a week had elapsed since Brander Nevin made the discovery of his growing love for Nettie and during all that time he had not stirred outside the grounds of the Wyndhams. He could not tear himself away, and yet he could not decide whether he would be acting honourably in continuing his visits to the Carrs.

Did Nettie care for him? Was she learning to love him? That was the crucial question which he could not answer.

Brander was far from being vain, but he could not be blind to the fact that Nettie always received him with marked kindness; that at the sound of his step there came a glad light into her eyes, and a flush of colour into her cheeks. Certainly nothing had occurred with which he could reproach himself. No word of love had ever escaped his lips; he had made no conscious difference between the two sisters, but in his heart he felt assured that Nettie regarded him with different feelings from those of her sister.

He had stepped out into the lawn and was pacing to and fro, pondering these thoughts, when suddenly he became aware of a man walking

briskly up the carriage drive. It was Mr. Carr who greeted him with frank pleasure.—

"Forgive the intrusion," he said, "but I have come purposely to ascertain if there was anything amiss. Do you know we have seen nothing of you for several days, and I came to the conclusion that you were ill."

"Thanks no, I am not ill, I have been busy with my correspondence."

The young man spoke absently for although his thoughts were centred in his visitor they were far removed from the discussion of temporary ailments. He was holding converse with an unseen spirit, whether his good or his evil angel, he did not know.

"Here is a splendid opportunity," something whispered, "now is the time to resolve your doubts; you may never get another chance."

"Tell him everything; he must know some day if you are going to ask Nettie to be your wife, and how much better that it should come from you now. Lay bare your life to him. Drag out that wretched skeleton that is slowly eating into your heart, it may not seem so terrible to him."

"Perhaps even he may believe your story and trust you. And if he rejects the idea of your innocence now, will he be likely to alter later on?"

"Think what your continued silence may mean to Nettie! She may not love you now, but she will do so and you know it."

"Are you going to gain her love and marry her, without a sign? Is that your boasted honour? Or will you tell her at the last moment, and so embitter the remainder of her existence?"

"Nonsense!" he heard another voice say, "sheer folly! Why should you make this man your father confessor? You owe him nothing; he is nothing more to you than an ordinary neighbour."

"Do you think he would believe you? Pure illusion! He would laugh in your face and forbid you his house."

"Why should you deny yourself the simple pleasures of life and cut yourself adrift from the society of people who make your life happier than it has been for years?"

"Are you never to have any peace? Are you to be an Ishmael for ever, wandering from place to place, unhappy, miserable, the glory of your manhood's strength dimmed by this black cloud which will never lift?"

"Besides, you are over-fanciful; your misery has made you morbid. You have done no harm, you are doing none. You cannot help loving the girl, but there is no reason why she should know it."

"Surely you have sufficient strength of will for that! If you carry out this stupid idea to its logical conclusion, you will leave Barton; you will withdraw yourself from all your fellow-creatures, and live entirely alone; the absurdity is too glaring."

"Say nothing and remain where you are; there is nothing dishonourable in living in the next house to a beautiful girl."

"You need not pay her any undue attention, but you will see her occasionally, you will hear her voice, and your heart will be gladdened by the sight of her bright smile."

Mr. Carr stood looking at the young man curiously, puzzled by his odd behaviour.

Now he interrupted his reverie saying briskly,—

"I am glad to find you are not ill, but take care that you do not overwork yourself, you do not look in the best of health. Come and dine with us this evening, only myself and the girls, and they will give you a little music afterwards."

Brander looked him steadily in the face; he had made up his mind, he had chosen his course.

"Thank you," he said, slowly, "it is extremely kind of you to bother about me, I shall be pleased to come."

"That's right, we shall all be glad to see you, we dine at seven o'clock."

"Queer," muttered Mr. Carr half aloud, as he went his way towards the Laurels, "what is the

matter with him I wonder! I suppose he does not risk his money in speculations, but he looks uncommonly like a man who has received bad news from some quarter. After all, it's no concern of mine, though I should be sorry to learn that anything had gone amiss with him."

This interest which Mr. Carr displayed in his new acquaintance was as strange to himself as it was to his daughters.

For such a cold, self-contained man, it really did seem wonderful how quickly he had allowed this comparative stranger to creep into his friendship, for as yet he had not given a thought to the probability of Brander's falling in love with either of the girls.

"Well, papa," exclaimed Rosa, impulsively, as her father entered the drawing-room, "is there anything amiss at the Wyndhams?"

"No," he answered, cheerfully, "the young man has been worried by business matters, but nothing serious, I fancy, though he seems in rather low spirits. He is coming to dine with us, I have promised that you shall give him a little music."

Nettie said nothing, but her sister watching closely noticed that her cheeks were pale and that she sighed heavily as they retired to dress for dinner.

The evening passed in the most charming manner.

Mr. Carr exerted himself to cheer the spirits of his guest. Rosa and Nettie in their pretty dresses were simply bewitching, and Brander, as though to bury his melancholy in oblivion, had never been more brilliant.

But Rosa's keen eyes detected that his gaiety was not spontaneous, that he was acting a part, the reason for which she could not divine.

Another point, too, which did not escape her observation, was the impartial treatment which he accorded to Nettie and herself.

Hitherto he had taken exclusive possession as it were of Nettie; now he divided his attentions equally between the two.

Still, in spite of these minor matters, the evening passed very pleasantly, and it was somewhat reluctantly that Brander finally rose to take his leave.

"I fear," he said, "that I am extremely selfish. I have been keeping you ladies from your beauty sleep, but I must find my excuse in your own hospitality."

"A very pretty compliment," responded Rosa, archly, "for which we thank you. By the way, I presume you will be present at the Kelvey's garden-party. It is a sort of annual gathering of the clans you know, all the county will be there."

"A social function to which we are all martyrs," added Mr. Carr, with a sigh, "you will have to come or forfeit the good opinion of Barton for ever."

Brander laughed.

"I am not much of a garden-party man," he said, "but I dare not incur so tremendous a penalty," adding hastily, "that is of course, if I am honoured with an invitation."

"Oh, that is a certainty! Fancy ignoring the owner of the Wyndhams! even Lady Kelvey dare not do that, even if she wished to do so."

He laughed again, this time a little bitterly.

"Really I had no idea I was of so much social importance. But let me give you a piece of advice; if they induce me to play tennis or whatever game may be in vogue, take care and form one of the other side, for I am an unsatisfactory partner."

Thus joking, he wished them good-night, little dreaming of the tragedy which that garden-party, about which they jested so merrily held for him.

He walked home well-pleased with himself and more than ever satisfied that he had chosen the right course.

He had seen Nettie and had talked with her; he had heard her voice and watched the pretty smiles illumining her innocent face and for the time he was happy.

How strange it is that in this one matter of

love we are never warned by the example of others!

We watch the silly moths fluttering round the death-dealing light; scorching their wings but returning again and again until at length they are consumed.

Their folly is so patent that we scarcely deign to pity them; yet, after all, when our turn comes are we wiser than they?

CHAPTER IV.

The day fixed for Lady Kelvey's garden-party rose bright and clear.

The sun shone in an almost cloudless sky; a gentle wind tempered the heat with its cooling breath; the birds sang their happy songs and chased each other merrily on the wing.

In the park the grand old trees were clothed with luxuriant foliage, and from the gardens came the sweet odour of flowers.

In the breakfast-room at Montera Lodge a merry party were assembled, for Lord Kelvey had asked several of his town friends down, and they had, for the most part arrived on the previous evening.

"Lady Kelvey cannot complain of the weather," remarked one of the men, to his host.

"No! my mother is singularly fortunate in this respect, she is generally favoured with Queen's weather."

"It always appears to me like tempting providence to fix a day for any outdoor amusement in our wretched climate," lisped a tall, thin, slightly effeminate youth, who was toying listlessly with his breakfast, "it is a pity one cannot always live in the south of France."

"Nonsense, Jevons," returned young Kelvey briskly; "you youngsters seem not to have an atom of hardihood in your composition."

"Jevons's idea of happiness is similar to that of the cat, a bright fire and plenty of soft warm rugs," exclaimed another man sarcastically, and the others laughed.

"Take no notice of Riley," said Kelvey, for he saw a flush of annoyance steal over his guest's face, "he has made a bad book on the Leger, and his naturally sweet temper is somewhat soured in consequence."

"If that's all," chimed in Sardeson, a budding subaltern in a line regiment, "an hour or two in the billiard-room will put that straight."

He was but freshly emancipated from the dons of his university, and spoke with all the easy carelessness of youth.

Kelvey glanced at the man whom he had addressed as Riley, with a swift look of apprehension, but that gentleman only laughed good-humouredly, and said,—

"By Jove! the youngsters come on quickly in these days. Shall I find a quiet spot in the grounds, Kelvey, if I'll go and smoke a cigar," and rising indolently he left the room, followed by his host.

"I say, Sardeson," whispered Jevons to his friend, "he'll pepper you for that, and no mistake."

The young warrior looked up with an air of surprise.

"What have I done?" he asked innocently, "everybody knows what wonderful luck Riley has at billiards; why he makes a small fortune at the tables!"

"Just so, but everybody does not comment upon it in a public room."

Sardeson shrugged his shoulders; Riley was no particular friend of his, and he cared very little about being "peppered" as Jevons expressed it.

Meanwhile Kelvey and his companion were pacing to and fro in a shady path, bordered by two rows of magnificent oaks. Neither of them made any further allusion to the incident in the breakfast-room, but continued placidly smoking their cigars as though nothing unusual had taken place.

The two men acted as effectual foils one to the other, for they were totally unlike in almost every particular. Kelvey was short, slight and fair, with light hair, eyes of an uncertain colour,

and clean-shaved face, save for a silky moustache covering his upper lip.

His companion on the other hand was tall, dark, and strongly-made, with large bold flashing black eyes, and an expression of iron determination.

Presently, withdrawing the cigar from his lips, he said curtly,—

"Nothing fresh here, I suppose, since my last visit?"

Lord Kelvey looked at him curiously.

"No!" he answered, "nothing very important, we have a new neighbour, that is all. Not much in your line, I should say. He's a bit of a recluse; does not play nor hunt, nor shoot, nor do anything. Oh, I forgot that; he has one taste in common with you; he cultivates the Carrs a great deal. Now I come to think of it, Jim, I fear your preserve is in a fair way of being poached," and the young nobleman laughed.

The big man did not laugh; his brow clouded with a heavy scowl, and the black eyes flashed ominously.

"What do you mean?" he cried, "do you wish me to understand that he goes to the Carrs with a purpose?"

"How do I know?" with an impatient gesture, "I am not the man's father confessor. I only know that he frequents the Laurels, but whether the father or the daughters attract him is more than I can say."

"Don't be a fool, Kelvey," said his friend roughly, "but answer my question. Is he making love to Nettie?"

"Well! honestly, I don't know, but it's either Nettie or her sister. You must ask Pollie Bankes, she knows all about the business from beginning to end."

"Trust her," began Riley savagely, but Lord Kelvey interrupted him.

"Wait a minute, that will keep until presently, there she is going up to the house to offer her services to the mater, I'll warrant. We can just intercept her from here if you really wish to learn more about the connection between the Wyndhams and the Laurels."

Riley responded with an energetic affirmative, and throwing away their half-smoked cigars, the two men sauntered quietly in the direction of Miss Pollie Bankes.

That young lady met them with a bright smile, she was always lavish of smiles and elegant little mannerisms which cost neither money nor trouble, and was readily induced to talk about Mr. Carr and his two daughters.

"Though really," she said, with a charming little pout, "I see very little of them now, they are too completely taken up with their new neighbour. Ah! Mr. Riley," as if suddenly recalling to mind a half-forgotten fact, "I am so sorry to have wounded your feelings; I ought to have remembered how much this news would affect you. You must forgive me; it was mere thoughtlessness; I fear sometimes my tongue outruns my discretion."

"Go on," he said hoarsely, "tell me which of the two it is."

"Surely it is unnecessary to ask that question," she replied sweetly, "who could place Rosa in competition with my charming Nettie?"

She read the agony in the man's face, and the sight of his sufferings pleased her. She did not forget that once upon a time Mr. James Riley had been her most devoted cavalier until Nettie's beauty had lured him from his allegiance, and she was glad punishment was being meted out to him.

When she had gone he turned to Kelvey, and asked,—

"Will they be here?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, don't wait for me, I will be back by luncheon, I am going for a walk."

Kelvey nodded not unkindly, for he partly realised the depth of his friend's distress, and, without another word, Riley turned and walked swiftly away. He was very angry, and the knowledge that there was no reason for his anger only made him the more bitter.

He was desperately in love with Nettie Carr as Kelvey knew, and regarded her as his own pecu-

liar property, though the girl had never given him the slightest encouragement. She had treated him in a friendly spirit which he had mistaken for a warmer feeling, though no word of love had ever passed between them. Still he loved her, he had come down, indeed, on this particular occasion almost for the express purpose of asking her to be his wife, and this information, which lost nothing by coming through Pollie, made him furious.

Rather strangely Nevin's name had not been mentioned, so that Riley could think of his rival, only as the master of the Wyndhams. One thing, however, his position assured; he must be rich, which would affect, if not Nettie, at least her father. Who was this man? He had not found out his name, but that omission could easily be remedied; he would ask Kelvey on his return.

As it chanced he did not require Lord Kelvey's assistance; the information came to him naturally during the course of conversation at luncheon.

"Did you see anything of Mr. Nevin?" Lady Kelvey asked her son.

"No! I have not been in the direction of the Wyndhams this morning."

Riley started. "Nevin!" what a curious coincidence.

Presently someone else spoke; it was young Jevons.

"Uncommon name that; sounds well though, Brander Nevin."

Fortunately Riley was a man of strong nerves, and as he had taken no part in the conversation, no one noticed the look of savage joy which shot across his face. Bending his head still lower he listened eagerly to the snatches of talk which reached him.

"No! I don't know him, a new man, I believe; self-made, but enormously wealthy, and riches cover a multitude of defects nowadays."

"Oh! Nevin is a gentleman," broke in Kelvey; "not my style, I confess; too gloomy and reserved, but nothing of the *parvenu*. However, you'll see him yourself later on, and be able to judge."

Still Riley sat, not uttering a syllable, but listening intently.

It was Lady Kelvey who spoke now.

"Good-looking!" she said, in answer to a question. "Well, that depends so largely upon one's personal tastes. For my own part I consider Mr. Nevin a decidedly handsome man, though I admit his expression is against him. His face is far too full of trouble and sadness for so young a man."

Riley could scarcely restrain himself; his heart beat so violently against his ribs, that he dreaded lest the lady at his side should hear it. This was the man who dared enter the lists against him in rivalry! He could hardly conceal his exultation; he panted to cry aloud in triumph. Had he been a religious man he would have repeated the text about his enemy being delivered into his hand; as it was he contented himself with a silent vow to sweep this wretched antagonist from his path.

When the guests began to arrive he stationed himself in such a position, that, unseen himself, he yet could command a view of most of the proceedings.

"It is impossible to be mistaken," he muttered, "there cannot be two Brander Nevins in England corresponding to the same description. Strange that he should cross my path again, but he must take the consequences. I'll give him a fair chance; he shall choose whether it shall be war or peace."

He waited a considerable time, for the party from the Laurels was late, and Brander had remained to accompany them. At last they came in sight, Rosa with her father, Nettie with a merry smile on her face, talking to Brander.

The hidden watcher started with a violent sensation of rage, as they, unconscious of his presence, advanced, one and all ignorant of the tragedy that with ghostly feet was dogging their steps.

Hitherto Riley had no desire to strike save in self-defence, now he almost hoped that Brander would afford him the chance. Still, he would be true to his silently-uttered promise. If the

fellow would go away, and give up his absurd pretensions to Nettie, he would stay his hand; if not—ah, then he would crush him in hopeless misery.

Having let them pass on, he slipped out another way, and presently met them as if by accident. It was managed admirably. He shook hands with Mr. Carr, complimented the girls with easy grace on their appearance, and turned inquiringly towards Brander.

"Ah!" said Mr. Carr, "I forgot. You do not know the latest addition to Barton society; Mr. Riley—Mr. Brander Nevin."

Riley turned in the most natural manner and bowed politely, while at the same time an expression of amazement broke from Mr. Carr's lips.

"Good Heavens, man, what is amiss? Are you ill?"

Brander stood as if he had been changed into stone. The blood had fled from his face, leaving him ghastly white, and his limbs trembled perceptibly. But he was a brave man, not to be beaten without a struggle; he had been taken at a disadvantage, and the shock had proved too great, but he recovered sufficiently to answer in a faint voice,—

"Do not be alarmed, it is nothing; a dizziness in the head to which I am subject. I shall be all right in a few moments."

Nettie and Rosa gazed at him in dismay, and Riley inquired in his silkiest tones if he could render any assistance, but by a great effort Brander regained his composure and assured them that he was perfectly recovered.

Still the incident was so peculiar that Mr. Carr found his mind recurring to it, again and again, and the more he pondered, the more strange it appeared.

Later on another little matter aroused his attention, which he did not hesitate to connect with Brander's fainting fit of the afternoon.

The evening was drawing to a close, some of the guests had already departed, and he was waiting for his girls to return from wishing Lady Kelvey farewell.

Brander was standing a few yards away, when suddenly Mr. Carr saw Riley approach and whisper. He noticed the other start angrily, and then nod his head as if agreeing to some disagreeable proposition.

His astonishment would have been still greater had he known that the owner of the Wyndhams had just consented to meet this apparently casual acquaintance privately that night.

CHAPTER V.

BRANDER NEVIN will never forget the main incident of Lady Kelvey's garden-party, though the details of the wretched day have long since passed from his memory.

He walked home from the Carrs like one in a dream, and declining a pressing invitation to enter, left them at the gate.

True, this impending blow had been in his mind for years; he had known it must come sooner or later, and had never even attempted to parry it. But just as present it would fall with a hundred-fold effect; more especially that the hand which would strike it was that of a man he hated with his whole soul.

He walked swiftly on to his house and shut himself up in the study. Not to think; thinking would be useless; he was in the toils, he recognized that, and was far too proud to make an ineffectual struggle. This man had him in his power and would probably not extend him one hair's breadth of mercy.

For a space he was consumed by a wild regret that he had not confessed everything to his neighbour, while he still retained the power of doing so voluntarily. Even that was now denied him; his story would be taken as the outcome of fear. Then he remembered his loss of self-control at Montem Lodge, and its effect upon Mr. Carr and the two sisters.

What would they think after Riley recounted his poisonous tale? What could they think but that it was true?

For several hours he sat alone in his room buried in grief, but as the time approached for his interview with Riley, he mastered his emotion and left the house with a calm air.

It was a beautiful, still, moonlight night, and as he passed down his broad carriage-drive scarcely a sound marred the almost perfect quietude.

It seemed as if nature had fallen asleep, and the silent majesty of the night reproached the tumultuous passions in his breast.

What did the man want of him? Money? He laughed bitterly; he would not give him a penny-piece if he had the wealth of the Indies at his command.

Out in the roadway stood James Riley waiting for his victim. His face wore the look of satisfaction which he considered the position of affairs warranted. He was the master of the situation, and though he did not intend to act maliciously, he could not help feeling a keen sense of enjoyment at his power.

As Brander emerged from the grounds he crossed over and met him.

"You are punctual, I perceive?" he said, with an assumption of cordiality, and he held out his hand in greeting.

Brander looked at him disdainfully.

"We will dispense with formality," he said, in a low, cutting voice. "I do not know why I agreed to meet you at all; but now that I have come I shall be glad to learn the nature of your business without delay."

Riley's face grew black at the insult, but he kept his temper.

"We shall gain nothing by hurrying; at least you will not," he replied.

Brander made no answer, and the other continued,—

"It is a long time since we met: do you remember the circumstances, or shall I recall them?"

This time the owner of the Wyndhams spoke.

"I am waiting to hear your business, not to bandy words with you," he said, coldly. "If you have nothing further to say, I will return."

"I think you had better remain. What I have to say affects you very nearly."

"Then say it quickly, for I am getting impatient."

"Considering you are in my power, you take matters with a high hand. It is a good game, and sometimes successful, but in this case quite useless. However I will explain my errand as quickly as possible. I have no desire to hurt you in any way, but I wish you to give me an answer to a plain question. Is it true you are in love with Nettie Carr?"

Brander's face flushed with a burning red, and an angry light leapt into his eyes, but he remained silent.

"Come," urged the other, "I ask in no unfriendly spirit, but my future action depends upon your answer."

He waited a few moments, but as his companion did not speak, he went on hurriedly,—

"Since you are so obstinate, I will put the matter in another way. During my visit to Barton I have learned, no matter how, that you are paying your addresses to Miss Nettie Carr. That may or may not be correct; if you will give me your word that it is not so, then I have nothing more to say."

"And suppose it is true?"

"Then you must pass me your word that you will withdraw your suit."

Brander answered with a mocking laugh.

"You are mad," he cried; "do you think I will submit to dictation from such a pitiful scoundrel as you?"

"Do not push me too far," returned the other, "I have no wish to injure you, but do not forget that I am flesh and blood. Once for all, will you give me your promise not to attempt by look, word, or deed, to gain Nettie Carr's affection?"

Brander did not hesitate an instant.

"No!" he said, "a thousand times no!"

"Do you understand all your answer involves? Have you counted the cost, my friend?"

"It means, I presume, that you will carry your miserable story to Mr. Carr?"

"Yes," with a savage cry, "it means that and

more. In twenty-four hours there will not be one single person, man, woman, or child in Barton, who will not look down in scorn on the owner of the Wyndhams. Have you thought of that? This time to-morrow night you will be socially dead. In all Barton you will not hear one friendly voice; you will not feel the touch of one friendly hand. And what end will you serve? Do you imagine the girl will marry you after she has heard my story? Believe me, you had better accept my offer."

Brander looked at him curiously for a moment.

"May I inquire," he asked coldly, "what may be your motive in proposing this?"

Riley laughed.

"That is a fair question, and I have no desire to deceive you; I am going to marry Nettie myself, and I do not wish a possible rival."

"Thank you, and now I will bid you good-night, since there is nothing more to be said. You have had my answer, the rest remains with you," and without another word he turned and re-entered the grounds, leaving Riley gazing with astonishment.

It was a dreary night that Brander passed thinking over the blow that had fallen at last. And yet in the midst of the darkness there was one little gleam of consolation.

He knew that his love for Nettie was stronger than life, that it would survive scorn and disgrace, and now that the kindly smile would never again light up her face at his approach, he need not altogether lose the sunlight of her presence.

He had made up his mind that he would not leave Barton. He would brave shame, and obloquy and ostracism to be where she was, to watch her happiness, to worship her though it were from afar.

In the morning, after his solitary breakfast, he wrote a brief note to Mr. Carr, and having despatched it by one of the servants, he returned to his room to wait.

"Dear Mr. Carr," the note ran, "you will probably receive a visit during the course of the day from Mr. James Riley. As I have no wish to prejudice your judgment of the story he will relate, I simply beg that in justice to myself you will see me after his departure.—Faithfully yours, BRANDER NEVIN."

As it happened, this letter reached Mr. Carr before Riley made his appearance, thus giving Nettie's father ample time to speculate upon the reason for this strange epistle. The old man shook his head ominously as he refolded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

"This augurs ill," he muttered, "I was afraid yesterday that the sight of Riley had something to do with that fainting fit. I trust it is nothing serious, for I have grown to like the young man strangely."

The girls were in the upper part of the house when Riley was announced, and the servant ushered him into the library, where he was soon afterwards joined by Mr. Carr.

After the first formalities, the two men faced each other with a certain feeling of restraint, and for some seconds neither spoke. The visitor was the first to break the silence.

"I am glad to have found you alone," he began "for I have a painful duty to perform."

The other man nodded, and Riley continued,—

"What I have to say concerns the gentleman whom I met at Lady Kelvey's in your company. May I ask if you are aware who he is?"

"Your request is somewhat uncommon," his host replied, "but I see no harm in gratifying your curiosity. The gentleman to whom you allude is Mr. Brander Nevin, the owner of the Wyndhams, and a particular friend of my own."

Riley winced; it was evident that Brander had established himself firmly in the Carr household. Perhaps, however, it was better so; the higher the pedestal on which he stood, the greater would be the crash when he fell. He returned to the charge without misgiving.

"I presume," he said lightly, "that Mr. Nevin has not acquainted you with the outlines of his early years."

"No; I cannot say that I have ever manifested a desire to pry into his life."

"Just so; a man of honour yourself, you are accustomed to deal with honourable men. Un-

fortunately Mr. Nevin is not a man of honour; he has gained your friendship under a false pretence, and however painful it may be, it is my duty to expose what manner of man it is you consider fit for your daughters' society."

This was a carefully-aimed shot, and Riley saw with delight that it went straight to the mark.

His host shifted uneasily in his seat and said,—

"This is an exceedingly unpleasant subject, but you must be aware that what you have just uttered takes the matter out of my hands. You have either said too much or too little, and it is imperative now that you should make your position clear."

"Which I will do in a few words, if you will kindly give me your attention."

The elder man signified that he was listening, and in a low voice his visitor proceeded to relate his story.

As it progressed a look of pain, which became more and more intense every moment, crossed Mr. Carr's face, and at its conclusion he sighed heavily.

Thus far Riley had succeeded according to his calculations; he had dealt a death blow to Brander's hopes, and made the way open for himself; so that he was totally unprepared for his host's next remark.

"If I acted rightly, Mr. Riley, I suppose I should express my gratitude for your kindness in showing me the true character of this unfortunate young man; as a matter of fact, I cannot. Mr. Brander is very dear to me, and you have given me a great shock. Under the circumstances you will pardon me if I bring this interview to an end. I am an odd man, perhaps a trifle eccentric, and that must be my excuse when I suggest that any further intercourse between us will only revive unpleasant memories."

Crossing the room he rang the bell, and almost before his astonished visitor could grasp the situation, he found himself on the high road.

By degrees it dawned upon his bewildered imagination that in ousting his rival he had killed his own chance of success, and when he fairly realised this, Mr. James Riley's face was not pleasant to behold.

"The idiot!" he muttered savagely, "but I will be even with them both; all Barton shall ring with the story before nightfall," and he walked off in the direction of Major Bankes's residence.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER Riley's unceremonious departure from the Laurels Mr. Carr remained for some time in a state bordering on stupefaction.

The peculiar incident of the previous day had aroused his suspicions, which had not been allayed by the receipt of Brander's note, but he had not been prepared for the startling disclosure which his visitor had made.

Some boyish escapade and folly; some unworthy love intrigue, would not altogether have astonished him, but this news overwhelmed him completely.

"Poor boy!" he murmured after a time; "poor lad, I am sorry; I was beginning to love him almost as if he had been my own son. And the pity of it is that it must be true. That rascal would never have ventured to have come here with a false story. What could have been his object now, I wonder? But I will go to the Wyndhams and see Nevin; no doubt the other fellow painted the case in the darkest colours."

He rose from his chair and opened the door, just as Nettie came down the stairs singing merrily.

Suddenly she stood still and looked into her father's face.

"Why, papa, whatever is the matter?" she cried; "you look quite white. Is it that odious Mr. Riley? I saw him come in."

"Tut, child," he answered unsteadily, "you are too fanciful, there is nothing the matter but I have had a visit from Mr. Riley, and now I am going to the Wyndhams."

Poor little Nettie; she tried to speak, but a great lump choked the words in her throat. She

could read her father's face so well, and what she saw there changed the red roses in her cheeks snow white.

And he, looking at the beautiful girl, discovered the secret of which as yet, even she herself was scarcely conscious.

"Poor little birdie," he said, tenderly pressing her hand, "why should I deceive you? Yes; I have had ill news, and about our young friend; I cannot tell you more just at present, but after I have seen him you shall know all."

She kissed him sorrowfully and let him go; then with a heavy dread of some impending evil at her heart, she crept back to her room and wept in silence.

What was the mystery? What was the meaning of this sombre cloud which threatened to blot out the sunshine from her life?

Some evil there was, an evil immediately connected with Brander Nevin, and a convulsive shudder ran through her at the thought.

In that hour of sorrow and suspense, she realised how dear he had become to her.

Until now she had regarded him in the light of an agreeable friend, but this suspicion of danger revealed to her the truth, and she knew that she loved him with the whole strength of her heart.

Meanwhile her father, bowed with a double cure, was slowly making his way towards the Wyndhams.

He had sorrowed with a genuine grief when Riley had related the miserable story; but now he knew that his darling child, his beautiful innocent Nettie, would be involved in the young man's ruin.

Still there was a faint hope even yet, the facts might have been exaggerated, at least, he would not yield to despair until he had seen Brander. The idea gave him fresh courage, and he stepped out more briskly.

Brander received him in his study, and closed the door carefully.

"I see by your face," he said, "that you have had a visit from Mr. Riley; and before proceeding further let me thank you heartily for acceding to my request that you would grant me an interview. I look upon it as an earnest that you will not condemn me unheard."

Mr. Carr inclined his head, he could not trust himself to speak just yet.

"Now," Brander continued, "I think it will be best, if you will give me the main features of Mr. Riley's narrative; you shall have my explanation afterwards."

His companion groaned.

"My poor lad! my heart bleeds for you. Tell me, I beseech you, that it is not true."

Brander smiled sadly.

"I fear there is a great amount of truth in what he has told you; but remember, as yet I know nothing of what has passed between you."

Thus urged, his visitor began in a broken voice to give an account of Riley's allegations, and as he proceeded Brander sat opposite him with impassive face, making no movement, and not once checking the recital.

"And now," said the speaker at its conclusion, "tell me that he lied; that for some purpose of his own the fellow has strung together a string of abominable falsehoods."

Brander shook his head mournfully.

"That has been, and will be the world's story, my friend. My enemy has said nothing, but what all the world will greedily believe. It is quite true that I was a clerk in Pardoe and Lindsey's office. My father had been the senior partner, and I was only waiting to pass my examinations to be admitted into the firm. It is also true that in my younger days I was addicted to horse-racing and lost a great deal of money on the turf. Thus far the account is correct and I have no excuse to offer, though it told heavily against me at the time."

"Now we come to the gravamen of the charges against me, and the particular event which ruined my life."

"As Riley has reported, there was a great deal of unpleasantness in the office. From time to time several irregularities were discovered. Odd sums of money disappeared and could not be accounted for, and finally a parcel of valuable

bonds, entrusted to my keeping, were abstracted from the safe, and never afterwards traced.

"With that theft I was definitely charged. I was known to be in difficulties: a copy of a most damaging letter fell by accident into the senior partner's hands, and no one but myself had access to the securities."

"Thus you will perceive that although there was no actual proof of my guilt appearances were strongly against me, and I could not demur when my employers insisted that I should immediately leave the office."

"From London I went a broken-spirited man to Australia, where, as you know, by a lucky coup, I realised an immense fortune with which I returned to England."

"Need I assert my innocence of the crime with which I was charged? I think not. Somehow, I do not know why, the feeling is strong within me that you will accept my bare word, when I say that my character is free from stain. I have but one regret; that I did not make my confession before. I had thought of it, but my courage failed me."

"I was so happy here, with you and your daughters for my friends, that I dared not risk the chance of your disbelief in the truth of my statement."

"Poor lad!" exclaimed Mr. Carr, warmly, "and what are you going to do now? Pardon my bluntness. I have no desire to add to your misery; but you must look your troubles squarely in the face. I believe you, every word, and I can answer for my daughters, but with that exception I fear you cannot count upon a single follower in Barton. It sounds cruel, perhaps, but after all it is better that you should realise the situation at once."

Brander bowed his head; but he thought of Nettie, and regained courage.

"I shall do nothing," he said, simply.

"You will still continue to live here?"

"Yes! why not? I have done nothing of which to be ashamed."

"But it will be worse than purgatory. Every door in the place will be closed against you."

"I am aware of that, but it will make no difference."

Mr. Carr coughed violently; he was himself in a difficult position. Personally, he believed in Brander's innocence; but could he afford to oppose what he well knew would be the opinion of every man and woman in Barton?

Had he been free to consult his own inclination his task would have been comparatively easy; but there were his girls, and he remembered the expression on Nettie's face.

Brander saw his difficulty and came promptly to the rescue.

"Believe me, Mr. Carr," he said, earnestly, "I shall never forget your kindness, nor the trust you have placed in me, it will prove a comfort in many a weary hour; but I cannot allow your entangling yourself in my disgrace. I shall ever be grateful for your friendship; but until my name is cleared I cannot trespass upon your good nature. Tell my story to your daughters, and if they have sufficient faith in me to believe in my innocence I shall not care what the world may say."

Neither of them breathed a word of Nettie, though indeed she was uppermost in the thoughts of each, and as Mr. Carr walked slowly homeward his heart ached for the girl to whom this wretched story would bring such bitter grief.

That Nettie had fallen in love with Brander Nevin he had learned for the first time that morning, and he dreaded the effect that this disclosure might have upon her.

In the drawing-room he met Rosa, and a glance at her flushed cheeks and angry expression told him that something had happened during his absence.

"Oh, papa," the girl cried, "I am so glad you have come home; what is all this about Mr. Nevin? Pollie Banks has been here, and she says the town is full of some absurd tale concerning Mr. Nevin having stolen some valuable property years ago. If it had not been out of respect for his father, she says, he would have been sent to prison. It is not true, is it? I told her I would not believe a word of it, but it is very

disagreeable having to listen to such silly rumours."

Mr. Carr sat down heavily in his chair; the man, evidently had lost no time in spreading his report; well, he must make the best of it, but his heart smote him, when he thought of Nettie.

"Where is your sister?" he asked. "Since the news is bruited abroad, you had better hear the truth at once."

"The truth, papa," echoed Rosa, feebly. "Surely it is only an idle tale! Papa, do you know it will break Nettie's heart if there be any truth in it?"

An expression of pain overspread his face as he answered,—

"Poor little Nettie; I would spare her this if it were possible, but she must hear it sometime, and it is better she should hear it from us, than from the scandal-mongers of Barton. However, you shall tell her yourself if you think it best. I have just come from the Wyndhams where I have been hearing Nevin's explanation."

"Then there is something in it!"

He nodded gloomily and related what had passed between himself and Brander.

"Of course," he concluded, "I do not believe he was guilty, but, unfortunately, he cannot clear himself. Even by his own showing, the case is very dark against him, and we cannot expect people to accept his bare assertion."

The girl looked at her father, thoughtfully.

"Does he intend to leave the Wyndhams?" she asked, eagerly.

"No, I almost wish he would; but he has resolved to stay at Barton, and fight it out."

"He is right," the girl cried, emphatically, "to leave would be a tacit confession of guilt, and, as he truly says, he has done nothing of which to be ashamed. By the way, who has set the rumour in circulation?"

"Riley! but what his object is I cannot guess."

"Can you not? The motive is not far to seek."

He gazed at her questioningly, and she pointed in the direction of Nettie's room.

"Poor Nettie!" he said again, "We must be very tender with her; it will be a bitter grief to her."

"Yes; but she will bear it better when she finds that he has not been frightened away. I will go now and break it to her. Luckily she did not come down while Pollie was here."

"Be gentle," he whispered, and the girl, kissing his cheek, went softly out, and took her way to her sister's room.

CHAPTER VII.

NETTIE was sitting at the window with a sad, weary look on her face when her sister entered. She had watched her father's return, and knew intuitively that he was the bearer of bad news, but she would not go down. He would tell Rosa, and Rosa would come to her; it was much better so. She did not speak, but she looked at her sister with such wistful, questioning eyes, that Rosa's heart bled for her.

She crossed the room and taking the girl's hand in hers she whispered, gently,—

"Nettie, darling, you must be brave, I am the bearer of ill tidings."

"What is it dear? What has happened? Tell me the whole truth; it will be but cruel kindness to keep me in suspense."

Rosa sat down, and drawing the beautiful head to her bosom, she gave the girl the substance of Brander's confession. Nettie listened in silence and at the end burst into a strange laugh.

"Is that all?" she asked, "why how miserable you look about it. Brander has been accused of a crime he never committed, and he has denied it. Do you mean to tell me that you doubt his word?"

She spoke fiercely and her eyes flashed with indignation.

"Hush, dear," responded her sister, soothingly, "we do not doubt him, you and I and papa; but we are not the world."

"No!" scornfully, "we are not even Barton, and when this wretched tale leaks out there will be

many of our neighbours eager to cast the first stone."

"My dear, the tale has leaked out; by this time it has been told by every fireside in the town, and, we may be sure, has lost nothing in the telling."

"And Brander! what does he say?"

"Neither of them noticed how naturally in her excitement the name rose to her lips."

"He is going to remain at the Wyndhams and face the storm."

Nettie clapped her hands in delight.

"Then I am content," she cried, "it will be an uphill fight, but we must help him, Rosa, you and I. And now leave me for a while, dear, I wish to think the matter over quietly."

Rosa kissed her and went away, while Nettie, left to herself, burst into a flood of passionate tears. She had endured the agony unflinchingly during the interview with her sister, but now, for the moment, her courage failed her, and she sobbed bitterly.

Though no word of love had ever passed between her and Brander, she knew that he loved her, and her heart had gone out to him almost from the first day of their acquaintance.

This, then, was the secret of his sad and lonely life! this was the reason why he had not dared to put his love into words; this unjust and cruel accusation, hanging for years like a millstone around his neck.

"My poor darling!" she murmured pitifully, "who could ever believe you guilty of a crime! It is absurd, monstrous," and as she pictured in her mind the noble face of the man on whom this terrible aspersion had been cast, her grief gave place to passionate anger.

At luncheon her cheerfulness surprised both Rosa and her father. She only alluded to the subject once.

"It is ridiculous," she exclaimed, with an air of superb disdain, "and I trust, papa, that you will speedily give us an opportunity of telling Mr. Nevin so personally."

Mr. Carr gazed at her in astonishment, and even Rosa's face wore a look of perplexity. She did not speak in a pleading tone, but rather as if her request were a veiled command, and her father, yielding for once without a struggle, promised that he would bring Brander to the house.

As Rosa had foreseen, the story by this time, was all over Barton, and its truth implicitly believed by almost every one. Brander had made few friends beside the Carrs, and his reserve had gained him many enemies who were delighted at the disgrace which had overtaken him.

But the real author of the mischief felt far from satisfied with the result of his handiwork. He had ruined Brander, certainly, and that in his present frame of mind afforded him a momentary gleam of triumph, but instead of advancing his own cause he had damaged it.

Lady Kelvey looked askance at him, when she traced the rumour to its source, and her own did not endeavour to conceal his contempt.

After luncheon Riley left his host's house, at war with himself and the world, and heedless whither his footsteps carried him, wandered in the direction of the Wyndhams.

Suddenly his pulse quickened, his heart beat fast, and a wave of colour came into his face. In front of him was Nettie, Nettie whom he loved with a fierce consuming passion, to gain whom, indeed, he would willingly have sacrificed himself and every friend he possessed.

She was walking briskly, and engrossed in her own sad thoughts, did not notice his approach.

Had Riley been a wiser man he would have raised his hat and passed on, but he was blinded by passion, and did not pause to consider the probable effect of his hasty action.

"Miss Carr," he said boldly, "this is indeed a pleasure little anticipated, and as fortunate as it is unexpected."

She glanced at him scornfully.

"There is little of pleasure to me in this meeting," she said, and would have passed on, but he detained her.

"I must speak to you," he cried excitedly, "you are angry with me, I know, and even in

common justice you must hear what I have to say."

She looked at him sternly.

"Perhaps you will unhand me," she said, "I am not accustomed to be dictated to, and now," as he released his hold, "pray make your speech as short as possible, for I am in a hurry."

"Your father has told you," he exclaimed, "what I revealed to him concerning Mr. Nevin, and you are angry with me. But, consider for a moment; could I have acted otherwise? Did you not guess the motive which prompted me? Ever since the day when first I met you, I have loved you; nay 'love' is too cold a word. I have worshipped, idolized you. For me there has been but one woman in the world. Could I stand idly by and see her threatened with danger, without uttering a sound of warning? It was impossible; my very love forbade silence. Had Brander Nevin been my dearest friend I would have denounced him and gloried in the act. Miss Carr, you look at me with contempt; what have I done to deserve your scorn? I love you; does that rank as a crime? Because of my love I saved you from being imposed upon; is that why you despise me?"

However despicably he had acted, there could be no doubt of his wild savage passion, the intensity of which frightened her. And might she not have been too hasty in her judgment? Probably at first he had been actuated by a pure motive, and believing in Brander's guilt had exposed him for her sake. Filled with this sentiment she said softly,—

"Forgive me, Mr. Riley; perhaps I have been angry without cause; if so I am very sorry, and beg that you will pardon me. With regard to the other part of your speech, we will forget it, for, though I do not doubt the truth of your words, there can never be any question of love between us."

"Forget it!" he echoed bitterly, "as well place me in a burning furnace and bid me forget the heat! No, Nettie, I shall never forget it, and I will never give up the attempt to make you my wife."

"Then I am sorry for you," she said, and turning round walked back toward the Laurels, leaving him standing there. She had intended visiting the town, but this chance interview had disconcerted her, and it was not until she reached her own gate that she remembered the object of her journey.

Unwilling to encounter Rosa or her father in her excited state, she wandered into the garden, and found herself face to face with Brander, who stood talking to Mr. Carr and her sister. For an instant she remained spell-bound, then with beating heart and heightened colour she advanced swiftly towards him.

"Mr. Nevin!" she said with a flush of emotion, at the same time holding out her hand, and then stopped in confusion.

Brander took the proffered hand and gazed steadily into her face. "Your father has told you?" he murmured questioning.

"Yes, and that is why I am pleased you are here. I wish you to know and to understand clearly that no one in this house believes a word of that ridiculous accusation."

His cheeks, which had been pale as death, reddened with a warm glow, his eyes filled with a brave, strong light, and he held his head proudly erect.

"You are very good," he said gratefully. "You have put new life into me. Your faith in my honour makes me careless of the world's opinion."

"But it must not," she exclaimed eagerly, "we believe in you because we know you, but you must make the world believe in you too. You must establish your innocence in the eyes of the law; you have been quiet too long."

"It is useless," he answered despondingly; "the truth will never be known now. If I thought it were possible, I would gladly sacrifice every penny of my fortune to clear my name."

"Have you ever tried?" she asked.

"No! I was young at the time; my father was dead, and I had not a friend in the world."

"Come and dine with us this evening," interposed Mr. Carr, "and we will talk it over. There are one or two questions I wish to put myself."

Brander hesitated; it was a great temptation, and he looked wistfully at Nettie, who seconded her father's invitation with a smile.

"Do not think me ungrateful," he said; "if I decline your proffered hospitality, but your kindness causes you to overstep the bounds of prudence. Remember, that at present I am ostracized; with the exception of yourselves there is probably not a person in Barton who does not honestly believe that I am a common thief whose proper place is in the felon's cell."

"That only shows a great reason why your real friends should stand by you," said Rosa sweetly, and Nettie threw her a grateful look.

"Certainly," added Mr. Carr, carried away by the warmth of the moment, "we shall not hide our belief in your innocence, whether you visit us or not."

Brandon could not trust himself to speak, his emotion overpowered him. Presently he murmured, "I thank you; from the bottom of my heart. I thank you all for your kindness and sympathy, which I had no right to expect, but let me have my way in this, my dear friends."

"Your sympathy is very precious to me, but I must not be too selfish. I must not allow you to be shadowed by my disgrace. If ever the time arrives when I can proclaim my innocence to the world, I will gladly renew our friendship; until then I must stand alone."

"But I shall never forget your unselfish generosity; the remembrance of it will gladden my heart through many a weary hour, and should it be decreed that I am to carry this heavy burden to the grave, you will know that your trust in me has at least lightened the load. To-morrow I will set to work in earnest; I will engage the keenest detectives in London, and devote the remainder of my days to clearing my reputation from the stain which now rests upon it."

He bade them farewell, sorrowfully, and turned away with a heavy heart, for he realised how stupendous was the task which he had set himself.

"Poor lad," muttered Mr. Carr, gazing after him, "I fear it is too late; he will never succeed, but the attempt will serve to keep him from sinking into despair."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON the night of Brander Nevin's exposure the parlour of the Blue Lion was more than ordinarily crowded, for it did not often chance that such a choice morsel of scandal presented itself.

All our old acquaintances who had speculated so freely upon the probable effect of Mr. Nevin's residence among them had gathered in force, sitting in judgment to their own entire satisfaction.

"It is a providence, gentlemen," exclaimed Mr. Drake, pompously, "that this Mr. Riley should have come down just in time to expose this adventurer, and I think we owe him our thanks for having come forward so bravely."

"It was a great mercy for Mr. Carr and his two innocent girls," chimed in Parkes; "they do say this Nevin, as he calls himself, was trying hard to catch one of the daughters, either Miss Nettie, or Miss Rosa, I don't know which; some men have impudence enough for anything. However, there is one comfort, we shall soon see the last of him."

"Don't be too sure of that, Parkes; if all I hear is true, Mr. Nevin has no intention of leaving Barton."

They all stared incredulously at the speaker, who was no other than little Potter the boot-maker.

"I don't say it's right and I don't say it's wrong," he continued doggedly, "but Mr. Nevin, he says, why should he go away! He hasn't done anything wrong. It was only a trumped-up charge at the time, and he isn't going to run away, not he."

Mr. Drake drained his glass in solemn silence; such audacity was astounding, and as he himself expressed it, quite took his breath away.

Mr. Potter, emboldened by the impression his information had made, now proceeded to deliver another blow, which excited an even greater commotion.

"Of course," he said, "we are all free men, and as such entitled to our opinions, but I for one shouldn't like to be the man to tell Mr. Carr that his friend is no better than a thief."

The retired linen-draper was the first to recover from the shock.

"You don't mean to tell me," he said, "that Mr. Carr believes this charge is untrue?"

Potter nodded his head emphatically.

"I met him not half an hour ago, and he says, 'Potter,' says he, 'don't you get listening to any of this rubbish about young Mr. Nevin, it's all a pack of lies.'"

In the excitement produced by this startling intelligence, no one noticed the entrance of a well but rather showily dressed man, who quietly seated himself in a vacant chair, and having ordered a glass of whisky, stole a cautious glance around the room.

He was apparently about middle age, not overburdened with flesh, but giving one the idea of both physical and mental strength.

His hair was slightly gray and closely cropped; his eyes were hard, keen, and shifty, and his mouth was firm and resolute.

He was evidently a stranger and for some time took no part in the discussion going on around him, though an acute observer might have detected that he did not lose a single syllable of the conversation.

Presently some one mentioned Brander's name, and a momentary glow of interest leaped into the stranger's eyes, but it faded almost instantly, and he resumed his listless mood.

When the last of the Blue Lion's guests had finished his potations and departed for the night, the solitary man turned to the landlord and said carelessly,—

"Your customers appear particularly excited this evening. What has occurred to interest them so deeply?"

He listened quietly to his host's version of the story, gave vent to a peculiar laugh, and taking up his candle strolled leisurely to his chamber, for he had previously arranged to remain the night.

Closing the door carefully he sat down on the side of the bed, and uttered a long low whistle, while his face, hitherto so calm and impassive, betrayed signs of anger.

"Brander Nevin," he whispered softly to himself, "and I have arrived a day too late. Properly managed he would have been worth a gold mine to me, and that fool has spoiled everything. I always thought Riley a fool, but I did not dream he was such an idiot as that. Of course, there is a woman in the case. What name was it those fellows said? Carr? I suppose he and Brander were both in love with the same girl. Well, Master James, this little amusement will prove expensive. Tom Lambert is scarcely the man to lose £5,000, because you have been smitten by the charms of a pretty girl," and he laughed contemptuously.

"I suppose," he continued musingly, "there will be a tough fight as usual. James has grown very restless lately, but fortunately he cannot easily get away, and he shall pay me for this."

Still grumbling, the stranger proceeded lazily to undress, and blowing out his light he got into bed and was soon fast asleep.

The next morning Mr. Riley was still lingering over his breakfast, when a servant handed him a note, which she said had been brought by a lad from the town, one of the servants at the principal inn there.

His face betrayed no interest as he glanced at the address, and he put the letter calmly in his pocket, but at the first opportunity he slipped away from the table and sought the privacy of his own room.

The writing on the envelope was that of a well-educated man, and as he drew out the letter he exclaimed irritably,—

"What does the fellow want now? More money, I suppose; it is time I put a stop to this."

"MY DEAR JAMES," the communication ran, "You will no doubt be surprised as well as pleased to discover that I am staying for a few days at Barton for the benefit of my health."

"Knowing your peculiar ideas, I do not call in

person at Montem Lodge, though at the same time I particularly wish to see you."

"Just outside the town in the direction of Bexley there is an exceedingly pretty spot, called by the natives, I understand, Beechwood Glade. I shall be there this evening at ten o'clock, when I hope to have the pleasure of a little private conversation with you."

"Of course, I do not wish you to put yourself to any inconvenience on my account, so if you cannot come I will do myself the honour of calling at Montem Lodge in the morning."

"Ever yours affectionately,

"TOM LAMBERT."

"P.S.—As I am trusting to you to pay my hotel expenses, it would be as well if you put a little loose cash in your pocket before starting."

As Riley read and re-read this precious epistle, the blood mounted in his face and he rose and paced the room angrily.

"The insolent rascal," he muttered, "I have borne with him long enough, he shall learn to-night that he can go too far."

His eyes glittered savagely and he tore the obnoxious letter in shreds. In very truth he was reckless and desperate; everything had gone wrong.

He had played for Mr. Carr's favour and lost; Nettie, whom he loved with a fierce, unbridled passion, scorned him and did not conceal her loathing; even the Kelveys had turned against him, and now this man had dropped, as it were, from the skies, with his scarcely veiled threats.

All day long he kept his own room on the plea of business, and after dinner he retired early.

Fortunately for his design, the coolness which had arisen between himself and Lord Kelvey prevented the latter from throwing any obstacle in his path, and while the household were engaged in the drawing-room, he crept silently from his chamber, closely muffled up and carrying a heavy stick.

Meanwhile Mr. Tom Lambert, smoking a huge meerschaum pipe, had taken up his position in the Beechwood Glade, and was impatiently awaiting his friend's arrival.

He was not without a species of humour in his composition, and the novelty of the situation pleased his fancy.

"Ah," he said as Riley approached, "I began to think you preferred receiving me at Montem Lodge, but punctuality was never one of your virtues."

He spoke easily and seemed to treat the matter as a rich joke, but there was no answering smile on his companion's features. On the contrary his face was stern and hard, and Lambert looking at him, prepared for a stiff fight.

"You do not appear in a pleasant mood," he said, "surely you do not object to my company. I hope not, for I have a great deal to say. In the first place, what is this absurd tale about Brander Nevin? Do you know that by your ridiculous conduct you have cheated me out of at least £5,000?"

The thought seemed to render him savage, and he continued angrily,—

"But I am going to have it. Do you hear, James Riley? What right had you to take the matter into your own hands without consulting me? And all for the sake of a paltry slip of a girl."

Riley's eyes blazed with passion, and his fingers clutched convulsively round his stick, but he controlled himself as yet.

"Well," continued the other sarcastically, "have you nothing to say? Do you intend to stand there all night like a dumb dog? What money have you brought me? for I am out of funds as usual."

"I gave you a hundred pounds less than a month ago; where is that?"

"How should I know?" derisively. "Do you imagine I keep an account of every penny I spend?"

"Perhaps not, but I think it will not cost you much trouble in the future, for you have drawn your last cheque from me."

Lambert grinned expressively.

"I've heard that story before; you always were

lacking in originality, James; why not try to invent something fresh?"

"Because this answers my purpose, and happens also to be the truth. It is a very simple matter; you have had a good long innings, and I am getting tired."

For the first time since the beginning of the interview Lambert had an uneasy feeling. He knew his companion possessed an iron will, and was as obstinate as a mule, but he had not given him credit for such determination as this action would require.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "Have you forgotten that you are in my power, that a word from me will land you in the felon's cell?"

"Do not provoke me too far," responded the other slowly, "it will be worse for both of us. You have had my answer; I have paid you liberally, and henceforth I will not give you a penny piece."

"How much do you think my information will be worth to Nevie?"

It was Riley's turn to laugh now.

"If you are building on that," he said contemptuously, "you are building on the sand. You seem to forget that by accusing me, you are accusing yourself, and the first fruits of your story will be your appearance in the dock."

Lambert uttered an oath.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully, "the prospect is unpleasant, but I will risk that. After all it will be little to me, and I shall have the satisfaction of dragging you down. To-night you are James Riley, Esquire, the friend and companion of gentlemen and peers, to-morrow you will be James Riley, forger and thief."

Stung to madness by his jeers and insults, Riley raised his stick, and almost mechanically brought it down with swinging force on the head of his companion, who fell to the ground like a log.

The blow had been entirely unpremeditated, and he regretted the action the moment the fit had passed away, but the mischief was done, and casting one glance at his unhappy victim, he turned and sped swiftly away.

CHAPTER IX.

This next morning the little town was provided with a new and stronger sensation, and the landlord of the Blue Lion was compelled to employ additional aid in order to meet the requirements of the thirsty souls who flocked to his bar.

As usual in such cases, all kinds of absurd rumours filled the air, but they all concurred in the point that a brutal murder had been committed in Barton, and that the victim had been carried to the "Blue Lion," where an inquest would be held later in the day.

The news reached Mr. Carr as he sat at breakfast, and being a magistrate he resolved to walk over to the town and ascertain the facts of the case. Near Barton he met Lord Kelvey who had already been there.

"A bad business this, Mr. Carr," exclaimed the young nobleman.

"Yes, very; is the man dead?"

"No, but Dr. Swan gives very little hope of his recovery. I am glad you are going over, you may be of service to take down his depositions."

Mr. Carr looked at him questioningly; if the matter were as serious as that, why had he not stayed himself?

Lord Kelvey caught the glance and said,—

"Well, to speak truth, I had no liking for it; I greatly fear it may have some connection with the mysterious flight of my guest, Mr. Riley."

"Flight!" echoed the other, "is he not still with you?"

"No! I have seen nothing of him since dinner last evening; he did not sleep at the Lodge."

Mr. Carr shook his head vigorously.

"Ah! I understand; well, fortunately, I shall have no feeling of delicacy to overcome," and bidding Kelvey farewell, he walked on rapidly.

He was greatly excited by the information just acquired, and wondered if there could be any

connection between this murderous assault and Riley's sudden disappearance.

Very unlikely, certainly, still, one did meet with so many peculiar circumstances in one's life.

The burly landlord received Mr. Carr with great respect and deference, for Nettie's father was a person of considerable importance in Barton.

"Yes sir," said mine host of the Blue Lion, "the injured man is upstairs, Dr. Swan and the Rector are with him; perhaps you would like to walk up. This way sir," and he proceeded to show his visitor the way to the sick man's chamber.

Tom Lambert looked very ghastly, lying there, his head swathed in bandages; but he had recovered consciousness, and he glanced eagerly at Mr. Carr.

"This gentleman is a magistrate," said Dr. Swan, "and will take down any statement you choose to make. Do you feel equal to speaking?"

"Yes," very feebly.

"Well! don't over-exert yourself. Do you know the name of your assailant?"

"James Riley."

The three listeners glanced at each other in amazement.

"Mr. Riley, who is staying with Lord Kelvey?"

"Yes!"

"This is an exceedingly serious matter, my friend," exclaimed the Rector, "are you aware that Mr. Riley is a gentleman moving in the highest society?"

A faint smile crossed the man's face, and pointing to the paper which Mr. Carr had before him, he said,—

"You take down what I say; if I am going to die, old James shall not get off scot free, mind you," with a show of energy. "But I don't believe he meant to kill me. He lost his temper and struck me almost without knowing it; don't forget that. Put that down; he has played me a scurvy trick, but James never meant murder I'm sure."

Then in a weak, quavering voice, with frequent pauses to gather strength, he related the story of his connection with Riley.

Mr. Carr wrote down every word eagerly, and as he wrote, his colour came and went, as he thought of the wonderful change, this priceless document would effect in his young friend's life.

For Lambert's confession practically absolved Brander from the terrible charge which had saddened his life for so many years.

The injured man admitted that he himself had been the instigator of the crime which Riley had assisted him in accomplishing, and together they had succeeded in casting suspicion upon Brander.

"James will deny it, of course," he concluded, "but if you require any further evidence go to Alfred Perkins, 35, Fiveways Street, Lambeth, he disposed of the bonds."

Mr. Carr pushed the paper towards him and handed him a pen.

"Sign it," he said impatiently, "put your signature, we will all witness it."

Mr. Carr was not altogether a hard man, but in his joy at the evidence he had secured, he thought little of Riley's wretched victim, and with a few brief words to his two companions he placed the paper carefully in the breast pocket of his coat, and left the room.

"Does he know who struck the blow, sir?" inquired the landlord, and Mr. Carr who was hurrying quickly by, stopped to answer,—

"Yes," he said aloud, for the benefit of the crowded room, "the man was James Riley, who falsely accused Mr. Nevin of a robbery he committed himself. Another time, perhaps, you will not be so ready to listen to a pack of lies about an innocent man."

Without waiting for a reply he turned round and passed into the street, turning with impatience to carry his glorious news to his daughters and Brander.

He hesitated for a moment at his own gate, but finally decided that he would go straight on to the Wyndhams.

Yes, Mr. Nevin was in, the housekeeper

announced, in reply to his question, "preparing for a journey to London, but no doubt he would see Mr. Carr; she would go and tell him."

Brander came in with a smile on his face.

"You find me busy," he said, briskly, "I am hastening to catch the afternoon train for London."

"To consult your lawyer!"

"Yes, but what has happened! you appear in high spirits."

"I have met with an unexpected piece of good fortune; can you spare time to accompany me to the Laurels?"

Brander looked doubtful.

"I must catch this train you know," he said, hesitatingly. "As your daughter said last evening I have already wasted too much time."

"You need not miss your train if you come at once," and Brander getting his hat, followed his visitor into the grounds.

"I have not told the girls yet," said Mr. Carr, as they walked along, "but they are in the house, and we will hold a solemn conclave."

Brander smiled in sympathy with his companion, but at the same time he felt mystified.

What had he to do with joy and pleasure! What was the nature of the surprise about which Mr. Carr talked! Had he received a rich legacy, or what had occurred?

In any case he thought it was scarcely good taste on the part of his friend, to drag him with all his misery, into the midst of his family joy.

They found the girls in the drawing-room, and as usual Brander received a hearty welcome.

"Well, papa," asked Rosa, "is the poor man dead?"

Brander's face exhibited a sign of surprise. This was the first intimation he had of the tragedy which had taken place in the town.

"No, my dear," answered her father, "he is not dead, but he is extremely ill. I have fetched Mr. Nevin to hear about it, because it turns out to have a great deal to do with him."

"With me!" exclaimed Brander. "I have not the least idea even of the subject of your conversation."

"Then you had better be enlightened," and very briefly he related what had happened on the previous night.

"The name of the injured man," he concluded, slowly, "is Tom Lambert, and his assailant was his friend Mr. James Riley."

Brander sat for a time stupefied; but presently he said,—

"Lambert! I know that name. He and Riley were very intimate in the years gone by."

"Just so, but now they have quarrelled; and when rogues fall out, you know, honest men come by their own."

There was something in his voice which caused Brander to look up, and which sent the blood coursing with redoubled vigour through his veins.

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Carr," he cried, "have pity on me and explain yourself. What do your words mean! Has anything come to light—quick, tell me?"

Nettie's face had become deathly pale, and her wistful, beseeching eyes rested upon her father as if he were fascinated.

Mr. Carr's features were wreathed in smiles, and taking a paper from his pocket he gazed upon them in triumph.

"Did I not tell you," he said, gaily, addressing Brander, "that I had received good news! Well, my good news is here," tapping the paper significantly; "and when you have heard it I fancy you will not care much to catch your train."

He opened the paper, and while the girls crowded around, Brander sat with white lips and dim unseeing eyes, for he realised now that in some mysterious way the cloud which had overshadowed his life for so long had been lifted.

"And now my boy," concluded Mr. Carr, huskily; "let me be the first to congratulate you," and he wrung his hand heartily.

Rosa, too, added her congratulations; but Nettie could not speak, though there was a world of happiness shining through the mist of tears in the blue eyes.

"Thank Heaven," exclaimed the young man, reverently; and he bowed his head, for his heart was too full for speech.

He did not go home again that afternoon, but remained at the Laurels; and later on found himself in the garden alone with Nettie.

The earth was very beautiful that day. The sun shone in a blue sky, the birds carolled forth their happy songs from the shade of the leafy trees, the flowers gratified the eyes by their brilliant colours, and perfumed the atmosphere with their sweet fragrance; and amongst this wealth of gladness walked those two radiant in the radiance around them.

Brander was intensely happy.

"Nettie," he whispered, fondly, looking into the girl's face, "this is a curious wooing, I think I have never spoken to you yet of love; but I feel no fear. My darling, I have loved you always, though once I strove to hide it even from myself. When I came to Barton I did not dream of such happiness as this. Do you remember that first afternoon, my darling, when Pluto frightened you so?"

"Dear old Plu," she murmured, softly, "I shall always love him."

"Nettie," he said, presently, "will you come with me soon? I have been very weary dear for many years. Now that happiness has come within my reach do not keep it from me. Say that we shall be married soon, dear, for my heart hungers for you."

"Give me a reasonable time, dear, and I will come to you as soon as you please."

He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. How wonderful it all seemed! Yesterday dashed to the ground in bitter grief and mortification; to-day the happiest man on earth!

No one showed much surprise at the announcement of Nettie's engagement; but all Barton hastened to offer its congratulations.

Lord Kelvey was the first to call, and as it happened he found Brander in the drawing-room.

"Mr. Nevin," he said, frankly, "in my own mind I have done you a great wrong. Mr. Riley was my guest. I had known him for many years, and though I did not approve of his action I honestly admit that I believed his story. Will you forgive me?"

Brander shook his hand with genuine friendliness.

"There is nothing to forgive; you did not know me. Why should you have believed in my innocence?"

"Then you will accept my congratulations?"

"Thankfully; and I trust that in the future you will honour us with your friendship."

The day of Brander's wedding will long be remembered in Barton. The little town was *en fete*, and all the inhabitants had assembled to do honour to the master of the Wyndhams and his charming bride.

Tom Lambert did not die after all, neither did he suffer the fate he so richly merited, for Nettie induced her husband to let him slip quietly away.

Riley disappeared completely.

From the night when he struck down his old accomplice in crime he was never seen, though it has been rumoured at Montem Lodge that when he fled from Barton he made his way to Liverpool, and shortly afterwards placed the Atlantic Ocean between himself and the law.

THE END.

FACETIÆ.

"YOUR son is an actor, you say, Mr. Magianis?"

"Faith, he is." "And what rôles does he play?"

"Rôle, is it! Faith, he rôles up the curtain."

"How dare you give me such a dirty napkin as this!" "Beg pardon, sir; got folded the wrong way, sir. There, sir; how's that now?"

KITTY: "We advanced women have discovered that man is a total failure." TOM: "I suppose that is why you are claiming an equality with him."

MRS. TALKLEY TALKER: "How true it is that one half the world doesn't know how the other half lives." MISS CAUSTIQUE (sweetly): "Yes; but that isn't your fault, is it, dear?"

SOCIETY.

THE Czarevitch plays the cornet à piston very well.

THE Czar of Russia is said to have among his household an under-study, singularly like him in appearance, who shows himself at the windows of railway carriages and the like when His Majesty does not wish to be disturbed.

FOR the use of the young prince an historic cradle was sent down from Buckingham Palace. It is stated to have been the one in which the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York were placed as infants.

THE office of Lord Chamberlain is one of the greatest antiquity, and charged with the most miscellaneous duties. Lord Carrington, the present holder of this interesting office, is a shrewd and popular peer, witty and pleasant.

THE Duke and Duchess of Fife, are going to Scotland about the middle of July, and will reside for a month at Duff House, Banffshire, before proceeding to Braemar for the shooting season.

THE German Emperor is contemplating a new voyage—nothing less than in a balloon, under the direction of military officers. The place chosen for the departure is Griefswald, a small town in Pomerania, at thirty kilometres distance from the Baltic, on the line from Stralsund to Stettin.

THE announcement of the engagement of the reigning Prince of Waldeck-Pyrmont to Princess Bathildis of Schaumburg-Lippe has given great satisfaction to his subjects. Prince Frederick, who only succeeded his father last year, is the eldest son of the late Prince George Victor, and brother of Queen Emma of Holland and the Duchess of Albany. He was born at Arolsen on January 20th, 1865, and is consequently only twenty-nine years of age. Princess Bathildis is the second daughter of Prince Wilhelm of Schaumburg-Lippe and Princess Bathildis of Anhalt, and is just twenty-one. Her eldest sister is the present Queen of Württemberg.

As everyone knows, the present Empress of Russia has always had her daughters much with her, and never had a so called governess for them, her own personal attendant and her lady of honour serving that purpose, and attending to the girls. In part this sprang from the Czar's love for simplicity of life, but in part also that they tried to surround themselves with as few people as possible, so that as little as possible concerning their private life should transpire to the outer world, of whom they are—and not without good reason—much afraid. The Empress superintended in person the education of the two Grand Duchesses, Xenia and Olga, and the Emperor in his leisure moments tried to do the same for his boys.

THE Czar of Russia has at least a dozen chairs of state, each of which is designated from time to time as a throne; and yet not one of them can lay claim to that exclusive designation. There is, for instance, the chair of state which belonged to Ivan the Terrible. This is made entirely of turquoises, set as close to one another as cobblestones in a road, the back alone containing ten thousand of these gems, which were selected from the finest specimens known at the time. Then, too, there is the chair of state in St. George's Hall of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg. It is made of the costliest woods with ivory and gold, and is richly jewelled, the back being decorated with royal eagles in gold and silver. The cushion is of ermine, the arms being composed of curious tusk-like rests.

THE Princess of Wales proposes going to Copenhagen in time to attend the festivities in celebration of the silver wedding of the Crown Princess of Denmark on July 27th. It is highly probable that the Princess will directly afterwards accompany the King and Queen of Denmark to Russia, as the Emperor and Empress are particularly anxious that they should all be present at the marriage of the Grand Duchess Xenia and the Grand Duke Alexander Michailovitch, which is to take place at the palace of Peterhof, near St. Petersburg, early in August.

STATISTICS.

THE average weight of a lion is five hundred pounds.

IRELAND'S linen industry employs 100,000 persons.

WOMEN workers in Germany rarely receive more than 10s. a week.

ONE SEVENTH of the territory of France is composed of forests.

BIRDS fly southwards during their migration season two hundred miles an hour.

WITH the exception of Russia, the United States has more cultivated land within its limits than any other country in the world. According to the latest statistics there are in the United States two hundred and eight million acres under cultivation, while Russia is said to have three hundred and forty-five million.

GEMS.

WHAT makes life dreary is the want of motive.

THE best portion of a good man's life is his little unremembered acts of kindness and love.

GREAT effects come of industry and perseverance; for audacity doth almost blind and mutes the weaker sort of minds.

EVERY man should have a good opinion of himself. He may find it hard to persuade other people to perform this arduous duty for him.

FLOWERS never emit so sweet and strong a fragrance as before a storm. Beauteous soul! when a storm approaches thee, be as fragrant as a sweet smelling flower.

REMEMBER that if the opportunities for great deeds should never come, the opportunity for good deeds is renewed for you day by day. The thing for us to long for is the goodness, not the glory.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GARNISHES.—Have plenty of crisp, green parsley, cut lemons into thin slices and quarter them, cast coloured jelly into moulds, such as half egg cups, and use them round the dishes. Use the tops of watercress and the green ends of celery, and cut boiled beet root into nice little shapes. They will all come in for "garnish."

BREAD FLAPJACKS.—Take a pint of stale bread crumbs and pour over them a pint of hot milk in which a tablespoonful of butter has been melted. Soak overnight. In the morning strain through a colander, and add two eggs, one cup of flour, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, and a little cold milk if necessary.

SALAD SANDWICHES.—Spread thin slices of bread with butter or with seasoned mayonnaise dressing. Put between the slices, from which the crust should be removed, small crisp lettuce leaves, sprigs of watercress, or some mustard and cress. Be sure to trim and shape the sandwiches before putting in the lettuce, that it may not have to be cut.

A DANISH dish with the peculiar name of Rodgrød—red goats—is made of fresh raspberry juice. You can either squeeze the juice from the ripe fruit or scald the fruit first, adding sugar to sweeten. If you do scald, press through a sieve when soft, rejecting the seeds. To each quart of juice add either an ounce of gelatine or three heaping tablespoonfuls of cornstarch; if the latter, blend it first with a little of the cold juice, let the rest come to a boil, and then stir in the cornstarch and let the whole boil until thick and transparent, but not becoming in the least milky. Gelatine must first be dissolved in a little cold water. Next stir in some currant jelly, or some fresh currants may be cooked with the berries, one part to three.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE average Japanese god is sixty feet high.

STAGS draw, by their breath, serpents from their holes, and then trample them to death.

THE earth's lowest body of water is the Caspian Sea, which has been sinking for centuries.

THE starfish has no nose, but the whole of its underside is endowed with the sense of smell.

IN Dijon, France, there is a poplar tree which flourished in the year 722. Its height is 122 feet, and its circumference 45 feet.

THE winds from an area of high pressure blow out from the centre, with a motion the same as the movement of the hands of a watch.

ANTS are provided with a poison bag, which discharges a fluid having a strong sulphurous smell, sufficient to drive away most insect enemies.

IN times of scarcity the South African natives sometimes rob the nests of the termites, and as much as five bushels of grain have been taken from a single nest.

THE tail of the kangaroo is the fleshiest part of the animal. It is considered dainty food when boiled in its own skin, which afterwards may be drawn off like a glove.

ON the State railways in Germany the carriages are painted according to the colours of the tickets of their respective classes. First-class carriages are painted yellow, second-class green, and third-class white.

AMONG the Sioux Indians, when one family borrows a kettle from another, it is expected, when the kettle is returned, a small portion of the food cooked in it will be left in the bottom. Disregard of this custom ends the borrowing business.

THE discovery of the process of tinting white paper was the result of sheer carelessness. The wife of an English paper-maker named East, accidentally dropped the "blue bag" into a vat of pulp, where it lay long enough to give the entire mass a bluish tinge before she could recover it.

A LOTTERY of mummies is being arranged in Cairo. The Egyptian Government have decided to present the six great European Powers with the mummies of the High Priests of Ammon, found two years ago in Upper Egypt. These treasures are to be divided into six lots, and drawn for by the representatives of the Museums of London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Vienna and St. Petersburg.

It is not generally known what loss of power is involved in the starting and stopping of an ordinary train. About twice as much power is required to stop a train as to start one, the loss of power depending upon the momentum. A train going at the rate of 60 miles an hour can, by means of the Westinghouse air-brake, be stopped within 120 yards of the spot where the brake is first applied. Now as much power is thus lost as would have sufficed to carry this same train 15 miles over a level surface. First, there is the momentum acquired by the train flying at a high rate of speed; then the loss of steam in applying the brakes; and lastly, but not least, the extra amount of coal used to compensate for all these losses.

THERE are many awesome and fiendishly ingenious objects in the Tower of London, but scarce any of these relics is so well calculated to inspire a healthy horror of the "good old times" as the object labelled in the Tower collection as the mask of Will Summers, Henry the Eighth's jester. For, indeed, this was no jester's mask, but was used for a very grim and ferocious purpose. It is a kind of helmet, made of iron and fashioned into the shape of a grinning, spectacled countenance. Its special use was for covering the head of any unfortunate wretch (heretic or sorcerer) condemned to death by fire at the stake. Thus visored, his struggles and agonies were calculated to excite only ridicule and derision among the crowd of onlookers. In some few other examples of these inhuman contrivances the mouth has been fitted with a whistle.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

P. M.—Sheffield is a city.

INQUIRER.—Next year Whit-Sunday will fall upon the 4th June.

NESBIT.—The gentleman should simply bow and raise his hat.

CONSTANT READER.—The palm, in the language of flowers, signifies victory.

O. C.—The prices vary in different districts and at different times.

TRIOUBLED PARENT.—A deserter cannot purchase his discharge from the army.

WRAK SIGHTED.—Nothing will restore strength to tired out eyes so quickly as rest.

ETHEL.—We are afraid it will be found necessary to dye the shawl completely.

LAVY.—Lavinia, a name of Latin origin, means a feminine native of Latium.

WORMED.—You may require cod liver oil, but a medical man should decide for you.

OLD READER.—Rhoda is Greek, the Rose. Rosaline is the Latin derivative, a little rose.

T. T. B.—Any person making a false declaration of age in a legal document is liable to prosecution.

CHRIST.—Powdered charcoal if laid thick on a burn, causes the immediate abatement of the pain.

BETA.—The only thing to do is to send it to get dry-cleaned at the dyers, you cannot clean it at home.

INQUIRITIVE.—The words of the National Anthem, as now sung, are by Henry Carey in the reign of George II.

FLORENCE.—Calicoes should be washed in clean water, dried in the shade, and turned on the wrong side to dry.

AN OLD SUBSCRIBER.—You are not liable for orders given by a person who has not your authority to give the orders.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Until they are publicly announced, the only way of finding out is by making inquiry.

ADMIERER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Dandolo, the Blind Doge of Venice, lived in the years 1196 to 1205 and took Constantinople.

ELFAC.—The late Grand Duke of Hesse, husband of the late Princess Alice, died March 13th 1892, at Darmstadt.

CREOL.—We advise you to shave regularly, and if that does not produce enough to excite hope of ultimate success nothing will.

ROS.—Remuneration for drawings depends entirely upon the manner in which the work is executed. There is no fixed scale.

CLEMENTINE.—Female book-keepers and cashiers are chiefly in large drapers', bakers' and fancy goods shops.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Red tablecloths keep their colour if a little borax is added to the rinse water, and they are dried in the shade.

ENDY.—White ties are preferred. Sometimes they are of broadened India silk, or they may be of plain white crepe de chine.

DICK'S WIFE.—You had better send them to a professional bleacher or cleaner, stating the origin of the stain.

DOVE.—Lamp chimneys are best cleaned by holding them over steam, then wiping them with a dry cloth and polishing with a newspaper.

BOURGNEF TOM.—Legally a man can sue for breach of promise as well as a woman, but he appears very ridiculous when he does so.

X. Y. Z.—It means a "war of words," and is pronounced "log-um-eky," the "o" in "gom" being pronounced like that in "Tom."

DUNCAN DOUGLAS D.—The Scotch name "Mungie" is pronounced as if spelt "Mong-les," the "g" being sounded like the same letter in "singer."

S. D.—There have been a number of persons suggested for this appointment, but it is still doubtful who will secure it.

LORELL.—Wire hair-pins were first used in 1545, and were invented in England. Before that time the hair was held in place by little wooden skewers.

S. E. G.—Soak them a few hours in cold water till they are well and soft, and then put them in a pan with sugar and a very little water, and stew till soft.

W. W.—The tail of the whale is shaped like that of a fish, but is flat sideways instead of up and down, and is often twenty feet wide.

MADGE.—The colour being one of the most delicate, it is doubtful whether the stain could be removed without causing a worse disfigurement.

TORAL.—Public-houses were first closed on Sunday mornings in consequence of an Act of Parliament which received the Royal assent on the 13th of August, 1838.

HERREWARD.—Lord Beaconsfield's patent of nobility continued his dignity of viscount and earl to his "heirs male," but as he left no son the title became extinct.

OLIVE.—Put a piece of green cardboard under the lamp, and the reflection upon your work will be more agreeable than that from any other colour.

VANITY FAIR.—White or light-coloured feathers can be washed in benzine without losing their curl or colour. They should be swung in the air until dry.

DOUBTFUL ONE.—The second husband is not liable for the first husband's debts, nor for the wife's debts before marriage, unless he has property acquired through her.

P. B.—Having tried so many things without avail, we should advise you to put up with the inconvenience. Remember, that if you succeeded in stopping the perspiration you would probably endanger your health.

A LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—Rhubarb is a vegetable root. The meaning of the name George is a husbandman—Thomas, a twin—Grace, favour, and Jane is the feminine of John.

J. M.—Milton became secretary to Oliver Cromwell when the latter was made Protector in December, 1653, and continued in that capacity till Cromwell's death in 1658.

DOMESTIC.—A domestic servant under notice cannot legally claim any time during the term of notice to look for another situation, though it is customary to allow time for that purpose to a reasonable extent.

H. H.—Treasure-trove is any money, bullion, and the like, found in the earth, or otherwise hidden, the owner of which is not known. The word comes from *treasure* and *trove*, to find.

REVENGEFUL.—If no real wrong has been sustained, the court would most likely award one farthing damages, and there will be heavy costs and all parties made ridiculous.

AN OUT-OF-DATE COUPLE.

We are "so out of date," they say—
Ned and I;

We live in an old-fashioned way,
Long since gone by.

He says I am his helpmate true
In everything;

And I—well, I will own to you
He is my king.

We met in no romantic way
Twixt "glow and gloom;"

He wooed me on a winter day,
And in—a room.

Yet, through life's hours of stress and storm,
When griefs befall,

Love kept our small home corner warm,
And all was well.

Ned thinks no woman like his wife—
But let that pass;

Perhaps we view the dual life
Through roseate glass;

Even if the prospect be not bright,
We hold it true

That heaviest burdens may grow light
When shared by two.

Upon the gilded scroll of fame,
Emblazoned fair,

I cannot hope to read the name
I proudly bear;

But, happy in their even flow,
The years glide by;

We are behind the times, we know—
Ned and I.

E. M.

BROKEN-HEARTED.—Unless there has been some actual wrong, breach of promise suits are a very poor investment. They generally end in a good deal of scandal, and have most unpleasant consequences.

A. B. C.—The cheque cannot be proved to have existed in the commercial transactions of Europe, outside of Italy, until late in the seventeenth or early in the eighteenth century; in England not till about 1760.

BENTIE.—If you developed a talent for drawing when you were a child, it would seem not so difficult to take it up again. You will, however, require an enormous amount of energy and application to make a success of anything in this world.

ONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO KNOW.—The "Reign of Terror" in France commenced after the fall of the Girondists, May 31st, 1793, and extended to the overthrow of Robespierre and his accomplices, July 27th, 1794.

JERRY.—Advertising began in England over two hundred and fifty years ago. It is said that the first advertiser gave notice of the loss of his horse, and offered a reward for its return, and the advertisement was successful.

HERMIT.—The original "Hermitage," we believe, was the residence of a hermit of the seventh century on St. Herbert's Island, in Derwent Water, near Keswick, England. The ruins are said to be still visible. A number of other "Hermitages" of historical interest are in various parts of the globe—Scotland, Russia, Italy, Denmark, and America.

POLLY.—If the black species, you can generally drive them off by scattering the leaves of green wormwood about their haunts. For the red species a well larded plate, with sticks as ladders placed round it, is about the best trap you can set now and again. When the pests are on it turn the larded plate, and as the lard melts they fall in. Reset the plate and repeat till they are all gone.

FRISKY.—Try a couple of handfuls of whiting in the soda water. If this does not answer it must be the make of glass that causes the unpleasant appearance. A raw potato ground in water is sometimes good against such stains if on the surface.

ETRIQUETTE.—Home manners are just as important as those practiced in other people's houses. Be courteous at all times to your father, mother, or sisters, and all amenities will become so habitual that you will find it very easy to exercise them when called upon to display them abroad.

DICKY-BIRD.—A great many birds change their homes with the change of the season. They fly to the South in the cool weather, some selecting one section and others another, but always return to the North with the recurrence of spring, and are said to visit the same localities year after year.

IGNORANT.—Carbolic acid is a substance not to be trifled with. It should never be used alone but always with glycerine or some similar article, or very much diluted with water. Bathe the stained place with a weak solution of soda water, or wash frequently with castile soap.

GUEST.—Each guest is under an obligation to co-operate with the other guests in rendering a party pleasant to all. To refuse to sing, or play, or dance when you are able to do so, unless you have some good excuse, is to exhibit an unenviable spirit and ignorance of the courtesy due to the hostess.

JOHNNIE.—It is a Dutch word, and means, literally "foam of the sea." It is applied to a fine clay, found on the shores of the Bosphorus and Black Sea, Poland, and Germany. Most of the meerschams sold in this country are made of a peculiar clay found in Staffordshire, Cornwall, and other countries.

MIKE.—Soak them in cold water till a good deal of the smoke is away—one water after another; then in tepid water and melted soap till clean. Rinse and put in water with starch. The colour will probably be much gone, but it may do. Some strong tea in the rinsing water might improve the colour.

BIRDIE.—Vaseline is said to stimulate the growth of the hair. It might help the eyebrows and eyelashes; certainly it could do no harm to try it. A girl with dark hair and eyes, if her complexion is good, can wear almost any colour. If she is sallow, dark red, deep olive, navy blue and pink would probably be becoming.

FLUTTO.—Yes, there is a hawk moth, which is so called from its rapid and vigorous flight. In France it is called the bird-fly, it making a noise in flying like that of the humming-bird. Many of them are so large that they are sometimes mistaken for birds as they fly from flower to flower in the dusk of the evening. They usually sip honey with their long proboscis or tongue while hovering over flowers.

P. T.—Put equal parts of glycerine and linsalpin in an ordinary jam pot. Place the jam pot in a saucepan full of cold water, of course not allowing the water to reach the top of the jam pot, and leave it to simmer gently on a clear fire. When it has come to a boiling pitch pour it into the receptacle and allow it to cool, when it will be ready for use. The same mixture may be boiled down and used again and again.

IN GREAT DISTRESS.—If one has a proper self-respect and a fair share of common-sense, there is no need of dying for love. Of course, there are griefs and hours of sadness but they come to all people at some time, and if they do not come from love they will from some other cause. By all means marry the man you love best and take the chances of the other dying of grief.

CUPID.—The pillory was a scaffold for persons to stand on, to render them publicly infamous, that all might avoid and refuse to have any dealings with them. This punishment was awarded against persons convicted of forgery, perjury, libelling, &c. In some cases the head was put through a hole, the hands through two others, the nose slit, the face branded with one or more letters, and one or both ears were cut off.

AMBITIOUS ONE.—It is earnestness that is enabling the young women of the day to make such progress in the various avocations of the world. But whether it be exhibited in business or in household matters, in science or literature, they are to be praised for their earnest endeavours to place themselves in the line of preferment. Our advice to you, therefore, is to persevere in the course marked out. Do not deviate in the slightest degree from the path which you think will lead to your permanent prosperity.

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